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New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (continued)

General debate

Address by The Most Honourable Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Jamaica

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence for Jamaica.

Mr. Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Jamaica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Most Honourable Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Jamaica, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Patterson (Jamaica): Your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, Sir, is a source of great pride and considerable satisfaction to Jamaica and the entire Caribbean. We regard it as a tangible acknowledgement of the region's active engagement on the global stage. I am confident that your combination of long political experience, outstanding diplomatic skills and commitment to global comity will enable all of us to benefit from your guiding hand at a time when the United Nations, the very cornerstone of global security and economic cooperation, faces its most severe test and the Charter itself is exposed to its greatest challenge. We also wish to commend the Secretary-General for his work during a very difficult year and in trying circumstances for the United Nations.

It may eventually prove to be a fortunate quirk of history that, by virtue of the rotation system, a distinguished representative of the Caribbean now occupies the presidency. For, by virtue of our history, location and size, we who fashioned the Caribbean Community thirty years ago recognized that we would never be able to acquire the economic power or military might to stand alone. Multilateralism, therefore, affords us our only source of protection.

Therefore, from its inception, our Community has remained resolute in upholding the sovereign equality of States and the maintenance of an international order that protects the weak and powerless from domination.

The international situation today is filled with uncertainty and fear. There is a prevailing climate of distrust and insecurity. Humankind faces the dangers of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction. We witness outbreaks of war and violence and a worrying escalation of confrontation and conflict. There are new doctrines and policies that threaten peace everywhere.

The pillars of international law and respect for sovereign rights are being steadily eroded. Injustice and abuses of human rights still remain manifest. These are real concerns that underscore the need to strengthen

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multilateralism, to restore confidence in the United Nations system, to buttress its centrality in decisions that affect us all and to thereby enhance its capacity to enforce.

The multilateral process will collapse unless the international community asserts a strong collective will to review the structures, mandates and procedures in our global system.

In relation to efforts to strengthen multilateralism, I wish to emphasize four requirements.

First, multilateralism must be equitable. This is critical for its credibility. It should promote policies that provide full opportunity for all States to benefit from the global system and that take into account the needs, aspirations and welfare of the entire global community. It should be non-discriminatory and proceed from the principle that the lives of human beings cannot be differentiated on the basis of race, nationality or religion.

Secondly, multilateralism must be democratic. This is critical for its acceptability. Its decision-making should be based on a fully inclusive process, in which all States have a voice and where dialogue and equal participation are encouraged and promoted.

Thirdly, multilateralism must be principled. This is critical for its legitimacy. It must be based on common rules and standards devised and enforced by the international community, standards without selective application or double standards.

Fourthly, multilateralism must be effective. This is critical for its efficiency. Decisions, once taken, should be implemented. Member States must exercise the political will to guarantee that policies and decisions that are agreed upon and taken are supported and upheld.

Adequate resources must also be provided where necessary. In order to promote the interests of all States, the United Nations and multilateral institutions must facilitate the creation of new opportunities for economic development, through the expansion of trade and investment flows and through technical cooperation assistance.

In order to strengthen multilateralism, we need reform and rebuilding to improve the work of the United Nations in areas such as development cooperation, humanitarian affairs and disarmament.

No one, not even the five permanent members, dares to dispute the compelling urgency of altering the design and function of the Security Council if it is to fulfil, in the realities of the world today, the mandate conferred by the Charter of 1945. The case for expansion of membership is irrefutable, as is the need to redesign decision-making to correspond with the principle of the sovereign equality of States.

Let me make it clear: reform must extend beyond composition and geographical balance. The Security Council, as presently constituted, makes no pretence at representing democracy in the global system. This must be changed if we are to not fall into a dangerous abyss, and it must be changed in a way that deters arrogant deviation from the most basic elements of the rule of international law. We have been talking for long enough; the time has come to cut the talk and walk the walk.

In 2001, from this podium, I called for a United Nations renaissance. Unless we undertake it now, only those who believe in a resurrection will still be present. None of us will then be able pretend that we are not responsible for the demise of the Organization, nor will we be able to exonerate ourselves from the condemnation of history.

With regard to the General Assembly, what is needed is a resuscitation in the use of its powers and assertion of its role as the principal organ of the United Nations. This Assembly is a forum of equals. Its pronouncements and policy decisions must carry the stamp of legitimacy as it is the voice of the international community.

But while we emphasize the importance of institutional reform, there should be equal focus on the responsibilities of membership. There is need for a revitalization in the commitment and political will of Member States to support the multilateral system and provide it with adequate resources. Irrespective of the institutional arrangements we may devise, it is, in the final analysis, the Member States alone who can make the system work. We cannot afford to fail.

The critical problems facing us concerning war and peace are compounded by the proliferation of weapons of all kinds. Globally, military expenditures now amount to over 800 billion dollars annually. Experience has shown, however, that military power and massive investment in weapons do not bring security and lasting peace. The force of arms cannot

impose a lasting peace. Instead, it breeds a climate of insecurity and feeds violence, war and terrorism with increasingly destructive capacity.

At the same time, the arms industry fuels a rapidly growing underworld of trans-national organized crime, which jeopardizes law and order and impedes economic growth and social stability within our national boundaries.

It is tragic and painful to witness the continued cycle of violence and carnage and the massive destruction of property in the Middle East. No solution can result from the continued military subjugation of the Palestinians or from violence against the Israelis. A political settlement has to be found to provide security for the Israeli people, to establish an independent State for the Palestinians and to make suitable arrangements for the security of all States in the region.

We cannot begin to speak about the situation in Iraq without noting the atmosphere of fear, disorder and insecurity which now prevails in that country. We deplore the recent bombings of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad and the United Nations office, which resulted in the deaths of United Nations officials, including that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, and the bombing of the Shi'ite mosque.

We must all learn from what has happened in Iraq over the past year. The immediate question is how to formulate interim arrangements for the recovery and reconstruction of that country and the restoration of its sovereignty and independence, under a Government chosen by the Iraqi people. Efforts to re-engage the United Nations must ensure that it assumes a meaningful role in the peace-building process and the transition to democracy.

The situation in Africa has not been given the level of attention that is needed, particularly by the Security Council. The continued turmoil within parts of the continent shows the need for stabilization through conciliation and dialogue between contending parties to end further fighting and bloodshed. We commend the role being played by regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and by African statesmen to mediate and bring peace to those areas of current concern. But more should be done.

Additional resources are needed to assist to ensure that societies disrupted by conflict can be re-established and stabilized. The obstacles to eliminating poverty and disease can be overcome by providing material assistance, and we are convinced that Africa has the indigenous resources, the human potential and the leadership to prevail over adversity.

Within the global economy, the pattern continues of a widening gap between developed and developing countries. Wealth is increasing but poverty is also growing in critical areas of the world. Although we continue to raise our voices to warn of the dangers of this global trend, our partners in the developed world have given little indication of a change in policies that might reverse it. We are continually told that prosperity will come with policies of liberalization, a minimalist State and deregulation. In turn, these policies will unleash free enterprise to take advantage of economic opportunities that will lead to development and growth. But it has become painfully obvious that this model does not succeed everywhere, particularly in the developing world.

As you know so well, Sir, the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have for a long time been a region where democracy flourishes and the rule of law prevails. The strengthening of civil and political rights in our countries has been our passion since we gained our freedom.

We know that no country is above improvement in any of these areas, but there is a fashion in the industrial world — including countries that are new converts to these values — to imply that their adoption is the solution to all the problems of development. Were that so, Jamaica and all our countries of the Caribbean would have been havens of prosperity long ago.

What much of the developing world needs goes beyond sermons about the precepts of democracy, about obeying the rule of law and securing respect for human rights. The help we need is help in preserving those rights from erosion by the instabilities that derive from underdevelopment and from the steady deterioration in the global political environment.

In the international community, those same values are being systematically discarded and destroyed, as if our world society deserves less than our national communities. The persistence of underdevelopment — the denial of people's full rights as human beings — is

the major challenge that poor countries face. We make this clear, because it has become all too easy for rich countries to excuse themselves from any meaningful effort towards poverty alleviation and economic development by asserting that salvation lies simply in securing civil and political rights. This is exactly what they did at Cancun to the poorest countries in the world — to those who live in abject poverty — by denying their plaintive petition for a better deal in cotton.

As the current Chairman of the Caribbean Community, I assert that for us in the Caribbean, the future of our democracies lies in the strengthening of our economies, in a more favourable trading environment for our products, in more rapid and effective debt relief, in the protection of legitimate areas of economic progress like our financial services industry and in tailoring globalization and the dogma of liberalization to the needs of small economies. Our future lies, in short, in escaping the trap of poverty. That some are poorer does not make us less poor than we are; that some are less developed than we are does not alter our state of underdevelopment.

Trade and competitiveness are not everything. In developing countries there are weaknesses in production capacity and deficiencies at the micro level that can be helped through programmes of development cooperation. Regrettably, in recent years, donor resources for such cooperation have been shrinking. Where commitments have been given, there have just been too many promises broken. But we still remain hopeful that the pledges of Monterrey and the targets of Johannesburg will be taken seriously as commitments to be implemented.

Partnership should not be used as a vehicle for the imposition of conditionalities to promote bilateral political objectives. In our view, true partnership must respect the concept of ownership by recipients and the national priorities as determined by them. Decisions affecting development are being taken in different areas, in different forums and by different agencies. Increasingly, there is the need to ensure coherence in policies and programmes.

The international system currently does not have an effective mechanism for conducting such an exercise. We reiterate our belief that one of the urgent tasks of the moment is to create a mechanism within the international architecture, which will focus on trade, finance, technology and development policy in an integrated manner.

We want to draw attention to the Barbados Programme of Action, which deals with the vulnerability of small island developing States (SIDS). We call on the donor community to support the review of international economic arrangements, when the international conference meets in 2004 to review the Barbados Programme of Action.

We in Jamaica fully recognize that globalization has the potential to advance human development throughout the world. But this is not automatic. For globalization has also increased our vulnerability, insecurity and the possibility of marginalization. Small countries like Jamaica and groups like CARICOM cannot and should not be expected to follow the same policy prescriptions applied to larger, more advanced countries. Special and differential treatment of a meaningful kind is important, as we require policy space for our productive sectors. It cannot be expected that countries such as ours will abandon local production in agriculture and manufacturing, although we fully recognize the growing importance and potential of the service sector in both the regional and global economies.

In the aftermath of Cancun, we in the global community need to accept that trade rules must be asymmetrical in recognition of the diversity in levels of development and the size of economies. Trade rules must also recognize the right of all countries to protect their development priorities and vulnerable groups, especially their small farmers. Development issues as they relate to the World Trade Organization (WTO) agenda must be defined by developing countries themselves and not by others for us. The world community must recognize these principles to ensure that the global trade architecture can bring meaningful benefits for all.

Globalization may bring a more integrated world, but there will always remain significant variations in national systems, cultures and national priorities. There is no single sustainable model for political development or economic success everywhere. We live in a diverse world where different ideas, cultural norms and standards exist. These should all be respected in the framework of agreed principles within the United Nations. In a world of such diversity and pluralism, there should be tolerance, understanding, non-

discrimination, self-determination, respect for equal rights and justice for all. Those, for us, are transcendental values to which we in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean will always fully subscribe.

The United Nations should continue to promote respect for diversity while promoting the common principles and ideals that form the foundations of international law and order and international cooperation. This provides the only key for the pursuit of enduring peace, harmony and real development in the global village to which we all belong.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Jamaica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Jamaica, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Mari Alkatiri, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Mr. Mari Alkatiri, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, His Excellency Mr. Mari Alkatiri. I invite him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Alkatiri (Timor-Leste) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the work of this session of the General Assembly. We are confident that you will draw on all your experience and wisdom to conduct successfully the work of this Assembly. I assure you of all the support and cooperation of my delegation and wish you success in your task.

I would also like to congratulate the former President, Mr. Jan Kavan, for the exceptional way in which he presided over the work of the fifty-seventh session.

I speak today with a mixture of happiness and sorrow. I am happy to address the Assembly for the first time in this plenary in my capacity as Prime Minister of my young country, after more than two decades of having sought understanding and support for the cause of my people and having often lobbied for support in the corridors of this building. I am also deeply saddened, however, for having lost, just over a month ago, an old friend — Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello — an innocent victim of intolerance, extremism and terrorism. I wish to pay tribute to his memory and to all those who have served the United Nations and lost their lives in Baghdad and other turbulent regions of the world.

It was under the guidance of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, represented in Timor-Leste by Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, that exactly one year ago the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste became the 191st Member of this Organization. The President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, Mr. Xanana Gusmão, and I bore witness to that historic act.

Since then, our country has experienced significant progress in the consolidation of our nascent democracy. My Government has presided over the strengthening of national cohesion and has given priority to the unequivocal affirmation of the Republic as a democratic State founded on the rule of law by taking normative measures in governance to implement the provisions of a modern Constitution drafted by the Timorese and adopted by an Assembly democratically elected by the people.

Open governance is one of the programmes of my Government. Based on the principles of good governance, inclusion, participation of the individual and collective responsibility, open governance was initiated in January this year. It consists of bringing the Government to the people in the remote areas of the country to hear first hand their priorities, problems and needs, as well as to clarify to the people the national development plan, the Government programme, available resources and the challenges ahead. It also seeks to instil a greater sense of responsibility in the people and to make them better understand the need for their participation in the reconstruction of the country vis-à-vis the implementation of the national plan, the methods of achieving the objectives of economic growth and of the reduction and eradication of poverty.

In relation to the legislative process, we have prioritized the adoption of laws for the foundation of

the State, above all in order to avoid taking discretionary and subjective measures that are without legal foundation. Hence, more than 30 decrees and laws have been adopted by the Government for approval by the National Parliament. In this manner, we will create an institutional culture of democracy, giving basis to a democratic State founded on the rule of law and the principle of good governance.

The challenges are enormous, however. Of the 900 schools destroyed in 1999, around 700 have been rehabilitated and more than 30 new schools constructed. Despite this, 25 per cent of our children remain without access to education.

In the tertiary sector, we have a national university with more than 7,000 students. Hundreds of candidates are frustrated that their expectations of graduating from the national university have not been met. We now have a proliferation of institutions of higher learning that are not officially recognized by the Government. To deal with this situation, the Government has assumed the responsibility of preparing rules.

In health care, similar challenges are being faced. Much of the infrastructure has been rehabilitated and more is being built, but the people want more assistance and means of support. They ask for more doctors, more nurses, more midwives, more ambulances and health centres closer to their villages. A national health policy has been adopted by the Government. We hope soon to be able to reduce the difficulties in this area with the cooperation of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Cuba in the provision of doctors to operate in the rural areas.

In agriculture, more than 60 per cent of the irrigation system has been repaired and new systems have been built. It is important now to instruct farmers in the best methods of use for their systems and to make them responsible for the maintenance of those systems while the remainder is being repaired.

In infrastructure, in general, the repairs and maintenance have been slow and difficult. There are 6,000 kilometres of roads to be rehabilitated and maintained, and our people are demanding the opening of many others. Many bridges need to be rebuilt, completed or built outright.

We also are facing problems in the electrical sector, which is in deficit. We have re-established electricity production in all districts and in 55 of the 65 sub-districts. Dili, the capital, has power 24 hours a day. In the meantime, it is the policy of my Government to identify and develop alternative sources of energy that are more accessible and sustainable. Currently, we are conducting a feasibility study of such resources, in particular in the area of hydropower.

Access to running water for consumption is very limited. However, it is undeniable that the number of people with access to running water is increasing daily, more so than in 1999.

In the area of telecommunications, we are implementing an ambitious project overseen by Timor-Leste Telecom through a concession in the build-operate-transfer system.

At the end of this year, all district capitals will have at their disposal fixed and mobile telephones, for both domestic and international purposes. With the completion and installation of the telecommunications system, we will also create the technical conditions necessary for the development of television and radio, delivering the best service in the media sector, which is free, vibrant and responsible.

The process of reconstruction is taking place in an environment of peace and stability. However, areas that are key for guaranteeing the sustainability and credibility of the entire process, such as the judicial system, defence and security, will continue to require substantial assistance and support for some time to come.

In other sectors of the Administration, we need qualified people to assist in the development of the capacity of the Timorese, in particular in the consolidation of the financial and banking systems, border control, legislative drafting and the definition of a national policy, promotion of investment and technology transfer.

With this in mind, I would like to reiterate that, in order to guarantee the sustainability of the entire process and to meet two major aspirations - that of our people for peace, democracy and development, and that of the international community to continue to promote Timor-Leste as a success story, we must not forget to say the following.

To our people, we would say — as we have been doing — that they should be more patient. Above all,

we must demand their participation and that they shoulder their responsibilities.

We ask the international community for consistency, continued dynamic partnership and support.

To the General Assembly in particular, we ask that it endorse the Economic and Social Council's decision to include Timor-Leste in the list of least developed countries.

In keeping with its history of struggling for human dignity, my country has ratified a number of important international human rights treaties. We are aware that the ratification of these international instruments creates legal obligations, and the Timorese State will do its utmost to implement its commitments under those instruments.

With regard to external relations, we continue to develop ties of friendship and cooperation with our neighbours, namely, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, and in particular with our two closest neighbours, Indonesia and Australia.

As Prime Minister, I have made official or working visits to Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, New Zealand, Mozambique, Angola, Portugal and the People's Republic of China.

At the beginning of this month, a meeting of the Joint Indonesia-Timor-Leste Ministerial Commission was held with a view to resolving a number of residual issues of recent years, as well as to promoting new cooperation in the areas of commerce, investment, development, education, health and security. The meeting had a positive outcome. We hope to finalize the demarcation of our land boundary this year in order to begin negotiations on our maritime boundaries. Boundaries, whether land or sea, define the territory of a country. Within a territory, one can exercise powers of sovereignty or jurisdiction. For this reason, Timor-Leste, having as its neighbours two large and friendly countries — Indonesia and Australia — hopes to see its borders with both countries demarcated or delimited by the end of my Government's mandate, so that all the resources belonging to the people of Timor-Leste can be exploited in a free and sovereign manner, for the benefit of present and future generations of Timorese.

The relationship between Timor-Leste and its neighbours is developing in a constructive and dynamic manner at the bilateral, trilateral and multilateral levels.

Timor-Leste enjoys special observer status in the Pacific Forum and has participated as a guest in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Timor-Leste is a fully fledged member of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries; the African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Union; the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; the Asian Development Bank; and various specialized United Nations agencies.

The fight against terrorism, organized crime and trafficking in human beings, drugs and illegal arms is at the top of the agenda, regionally and in Timor-Leste. We will make every effort to contribute to the eradication of these ills, which are turning into a real epidemic with the development of new technology.

Timor-Leste is a country of South-east Asia which is linked to the Pacific by geography, history and culture. Our people are proud to be part of this great geographical region of Asia and Oceania — rich in history, culture and civilization, and comprising more than one fifth of humanity. We are deeply grateful to all our Asian brothers — Japan, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand — who have responded without fail to our appeal for assistance, on a major or modest scale, depending on the capacity and experience of each country. We are grateful to all of them.

I have ju t concluded a visit to the People's Republic of China. Within weeks, Timor-Leste will receive the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir Mohamad. In December, we will be honoured with a visit from the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand.

We continue to strengthen our relationships with other countries in South-east Asia, in particular Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam.

We deem it regrettable that the process of dialogue and national reconciliation in Myanmar is at a standstill. Timor-Leste associates itself with the concerns and disappointments of our friends in ASEAN, and we join our voice with those of others in the international community to appeal for the immediate release of Mrs. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and of all others who are being detained, and for the

resumption of talks and of the process of reconciliation and democratization.

My Government takes note of the commitments undertaken by General Khin Nyunt, Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar, in his speech of 30 August 2003. We would like to express our deep concern at the abandonment by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its stated intention to produce nuclear weapons. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has three countries as its neighbours that over the years have demonstrated friendship and solidarity. None of those three countries presents any threat to its security or sovereignty, thus the production of nuclear weapons cannot be justified.

Timor-Leste is a small country with a small population. Nonetheless, it has coastlines on two oceans and is linked to two continents. Historically, we were for five centuries the only Portuguese colony in the region, and, during a quarter century, a territory occupied by Indonesia. More than 90 per cent of the population of my country is Catholic, and there are also two minority religious groups — Protestants and Muslims.

History determined that we would be different. Our geographical situation conferred on us conditions for converging and relating. We remain different and, within that difference, we find our identity and sense of openness and tolerance. We know that we have something to give but we also have much to receive.

I am a Muslim of Arab descent and the Prime Minister of a country with a Catholic majority. Our tiny Muslim community lives in peace and tranquillity, integrated into society in general without losing its identity and without feeling alienated or discriminated against. The Timorese Catholic leadership has been exemplary in preaching respect and tolerance in relation to all religious faiths, constantly searching for dialogue, cooperation, participation and mutual respect.

My country does not intend to put itself forward as a model of tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence between religions. I am speaking about our experience only to say that in this world of hate, violence, intolerance and extremism, there are some oases of tolerance, peace and tranquillity that deserve to be the source of new energy.

Fanatics and extremists have existed throughout history and no region or civilization in the world can claim exclusive rights to virtue or truth. In this globalized world, there is no place for racial or cultural, much less religious, superiority. Extremists and terrorists have always existed. The fundamental difference is that the terrorists of today benefit from globalization and make use of modern technology as a means of achieving their objectives.

It is rhetoric, and unacceptable, to define different civilizations and religions as a target. The fundamental reason for violence in the world is inequality in development and, in particular, the injustice of the international economic order. The target of extremists and Islamic terrorists is not the West, its culture and dominant religions. Rather, it should be stated that the West is a target as a consequence of the global order.

We are witnessing a new reality. The agenda of the extremists is primarily the toppling of moderate and elite regimes and the imposition of theocratic systems in which the universal values embraced by a democratic State are called into question, as they contradict their views. Such an agenda would mean a return to the Middle Ages, with the Islamic extremists determining the fate of their citizens.

The fight against extremism, fanaticism and terrorism must be waged on all fronts. One is the military front, where action must be seriously thought through and always implemented with great caution and clear-sightedness. The other fronts include the political, economic and social. The fight against poverty and exclusion must be integrated into our global strategy in the war against terrorism.

My Government congratulates the people of Iraq on the end of one of the bloodiest dictatorships in history. The people of Timor-Leste know only too well the significance of a dictatorship. In order to be free of it, we sacrificed hundreds of thousands of our children in decades of unequal struggle.

During our struggle for independence and democracy, we always believed that our efforts should be focused on re-establishing international legality in our country, ensuring that the United Nations take responsibility and demanding that the international community respect the Charter and United Nations resolutions on Timor-Leste.

My Government defends the concept that the central role of the United Nations must be respected by all countries, in particular those with the means and resources to strengthen the role of our Organization.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, it is urgent that international legality be re-established in that country. The only legitimate means of transferring sovereignty to the people of Iraq is to hand over power to their democratically elected representatives.

We believe that the Arab League must be a privileged partner of the United Nations in the process of transition and reconstruction in Iraq. As it is a regional organization representing more than 200 million people who mostly profess the same religion, speak the same language and are of the same cultural and historical origin, it must not be ignored or bypassed when its own interests and that of the region are at stake.

My country is a good example of the kind of a partnership that can develop when the United Nations and its obvious natural role in the resolution of conflicts and the mobilization of international consensus is recognized. Each process is unique and has its own dimensions and characteristics, but our positive experience can be repeated in other places, and can serve as a reference point for Iraq.

I would like to comment on two issues related to the Middle East, beginning with Palestine. We express our deep disappointment that the peace process has regressed and that violence has escalated in that part of the world. We feel encouraged by the presentation of the road map, and hope that it can assist in accelerating the peace process.

We reaffirm our support for the road map and for the right of the people of Palestine to self-determination, independence and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We appeal to all the parties in that bloody conflict to cease all forms of violence, to resume dialogue and rigorously to respect the road map as agreed to with the Quartet.

With respect to Western Sahara, the Arab and Muslim people of that former Spanish Territory continue to wait patiently for the holding of a referendum on self-determination, as agreed to by all parties in 1994. We appeal to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the Arab League and the African Union to encourage both parties to return to direct dialogue with a view to establishing a definitive date for the holding of the referendum on self-determination in the territory of Western Sahara.

My Government is closely following the situation in Guinea-Bissau. While deploring the military coup that toppled the elected President, we are relieved that there was no bloodshed or loss of life. My Government supports the holding of new elections with a view to the restoration of a constitutional democratic order, if possible within the framework of the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, to achieve the necessary support for the bringing of peace, stable government and economic recovery.

We regret the breakdown in talks during the most recent round of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in Cancun. The industrialized nations must understand that the international trade systems must be rectified. It is neither ethical nor moral for the rich countries to preach democracy, human rights and the dogma of a free market, while practising protectionist policies that condemn hundreds of millions of human beings to perpetual poverty and dependency. It is less than ethical when they teach the rules of the free market while subsidizing their farmers with billions of dollars, making the products of our countries, which have a greater comparative advantage, increasingly less competitive.

Timor-Leste has benefited from international solidarity, and we are grateful for that. But we cannot remain silent in the face of injustices and anti-economic policies that impoverish the rest of the world. We appeal for the renegotiation of debt and for debt relief for the poor and indebted countries. But we also believe that debt relief must be proportional to the measures taken by each country in adopting strategies for sustainable development and focusing on the eradication of poverty. This means increased expenditure on public health and education, reduced military expenditure, the strengthening of democratic institutions, the promotion of human rights and the independence of the judiciary. Those are conditions that are indispensable for peace and prosperity.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on the theme of reform of the United Nations. The creation of this institution was the result of the collective experience of humankind, victim of the greatest scourge in history.

We congratulate the founders on their vision, but we are conscious that the institution reflects the reality of that period. In 1945 there were merely 51 Members, and it was viewed as a club for the rich and powerful, a "white man's club". But the United Nations today is a truly global institution, with 191 Members.

The recent experience of Iraq provoked a new debate on the need for the structural reform of our institution, beginning with the Security Council, which is increasingly being called upon to provide opinions and to intervene in many regions of the world. We support an increase in the number of permanent members of the Security Council to reflect the current demographic reality and the new world balance.

Many people are frequently asking themselves, and asking out loud, a few questions, such as "Is it fair for the Western Group to have three permanent seats in the Security Council, while Asia has only one and Africa and Latin America have none? Is it possible that India, the largest democracy in the world, with more than one billion inhabitants, does not have the same status as others? Is it possible that Brazil, with the world's ninth largest economy and Latin America's largest, a crossroads of races and civilizations — Ibero-Latin American, African and indigenous people — does not have status as a permanent member of the Security Council?" Throughout its history, Brazil has shown prudence and balance in the conduct of its foreign politics, an active and constructive engagement at the regional and international level and always a voice of moderation and dialogue.

There are certain procedures that may have been understandable during the cold war period. But today the way must be made for principles of democratic decision-making that are acceptable and universally practiced. We must question these paradigms.

We also believe that the term of the mandate for non-permanent members must be reduced to between six months and one year. That will give the 191 members of our Organization the opportunity to serve in this organ. Besides, a shorter period will allow the less privileged to feel the desire to invest their human and financial resources to serve on the Security Council.

The reform and the democratization of a number of organs of our Organization are necessary and urgent. The errors and failures of the past, when the Security Council was powerless and indifferent to human tragedy, should compel us all to have the courage to accept a fair share of the decision-making that affects us all.

Let the big, rich and powerful know that humility is the greatest virtue. Leadership means knowing how to dialogue, persuade and build alliances and consensus. There are challenges ahead. There are many threats. The resources of 191 countries are represented in this huge Organization. To respond to these challenges and threats, we must unite and build bridges of consensus and active cooperation.

Allow me to conclude by saying that the future belongs to the optimists. We are here today because we favour optimism. That is why the struggle must continue.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mari Alkatiri, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, was escorted from the rostrum.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Morshed Khan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Mr. Khan (Bangladesh): I bring a message of peace from Bangladesh.

Please allow me to congratulate the President on his election. I wish him every success in the formidable task of leading the United Nations to continued relevance and credibility in these stormy times. I am confident that he will build upon the legacy left by his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan.

We commend the Secretary-General for his stewardship in these difficult times. The United Nations has been faced with extremely challenging situations over the past year. We have lost one of our most outstanding men of peace — Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and many of his colleagues. Such senseless and despicable acts must not be repeated.

The new millennium, which we all heralded with so much hope, has been plunged into turmoil. Intervening events in the last three years have changed our world forever. They have left us groping for solutions. The events of 11 September 2001, the Afghan and the Iraq war, the open confrontation between Israel and Hamas and the African civil wars shape some of the dimensions of this world of disorder.

Driving these crises are new realities — an all-out offensive against terrorism, arguments for pre-emption and unilateral action as an option for security, the targeting of Islamic radicalism and its fall-out as religious profiling. Somewhere, the coin of global cooperation has been debased.

Each year we come to this Assembly to reaffirm our faith in the United Nations and our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter. Today, we pause to grapple with doubts that have arisen about the relevance of the world body. I hasten to add that for Bangladesh, this pause is very short-lived. The cardinal question is not what is wrong with the United Nations, but what is right with it and how we can make it serve our purposes despite seeming setbacks.

Three compelling factors stand out. The first is universality. All 191 States of the world wish to be within the fold of the international community. Second is the flip side of globalization. The bottom line is that no one State alone can deal with the intricate problems facing our world — be it the dysfunction of the collective security system, an interlocking economic, monetary, financial and trade grid, the challenges of globalization, international terrorism, environmental degradation, new diseases, trans-border organized crime, and so on. The conclusion is clear. The United Nations is indispensable as the central organ for the collective management of world affairs.

The third factor is legitimacy. As has been underlined, the greatest strength of the United Nations remains its legitimacy, founded on the bedrock principles of international law. There is no substitute for that legitimacy. It is by this measure that we look to the United Nations.

But as the Secretary-General notes in his report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, "The war exposed deep divisions in the international community, with accusations of double agendas". He goes on to observe that "The war in Iraq brought to the fore a host of questions of principle and practice that challenge the United Nations and the international community as a whole". This is a sad commentary on the state of the world body today.

In contrast, we have noted that wherever the United Nations was allowed to take up its rightful role and responsibility, and where it was provided with necessary support, it has achieved success, durable peace and stability. The experience of East Timor, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name only a few, have vindicated the legitimacy, role and relevance of the United Nations. War can be won by military might; the challenge lies in winning peace. That is what the United Nations, with over half a century of experience in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building, is best placed to do.

We in Bangladesh place our full trust — and have total confidence — in the capacity of the United Nations to address matters of international and global concern, including peace and security. We see the United Nations as a source of inspiration, initiative and support in our national, regional and international endeavours. It is in this forum that we establish common standards, universal values and shared programmes. In a globalizing world, no nation is an island; none can prosper alone. We therefore believe that today, more than ever before, the Organization deserves the support of all of our nations in a more active and demonstrable way.

The Secretary-General deserves our appreciation for bringing the focus of the Organization back to its socio-economic agenda. We welcome his report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. His assessment of the progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals is sobering. While signs of progress for a given region are noted, the road to 2015 is long for many of our nations. The report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Development Programme concerning the Millennium Development Goals, for instance, draws attention to the worrying declines in the flow of official development assistance to the least developed areas and countries; it described that as "unacceptable and unconscionable". The report has also called for reforms in the international trade system to help the poorest countries.

Against that backdrop, the setback at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, held at Cancún, warrants an early resumption of the

negotiations. A breakthrough will require courageous decisions and significant compromises. Our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals also requires that the negotiations be concluded successfully. The global economic situation today dictates equitable trade policies and fair trade practices, which were sought in the Doha round. The economic survival and the socio-economic stability of many nations depend on how we handle post-Cancun challenges. The stakes are very high for all of us, in both the short and the long term.

The development policies and programmes of our Government, led by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia, are based on the Millennium Development Goals. Our resource allocation in the social sector remains high, and we have prepared a three-year economic growth, poverty reduction and social development strategy. That is a major initial policy framework. We look forward to working closely together with our development partners in our implementation of those policies.

The governance paradigm in recent decades has happily embraced the fundamental tenets of democracy. In Bangladesh, we have the necessary institutions in place. We are reforming, modernizing and expanding them. As a thriving democracy ourselves, we support United Nations efforts aimed at promoting the rule of law, good governance and human rights. We believe that all human rights — including the right to development — should be pursued in a comprehensive manner and with a holistic approach.

The past year has seen serious developments in the international peace and security situation, especially in Africa and the Middle East. Bangladesh has taken a positive and constructive approach to all these issues. We have consistently supported the efforts of the United Nations in that regard. We have done that as a matter of our commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and its Charter.

In practical terms, Bangladesh has remained a major partner of the United Nations in its peace and security mission. Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations in four continents, including the most perilous ones. We are currently among the largest contributors of troops and other personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations, with thousands of our troops in eight Missions, in Côte d'Ivoire, Western Sahara, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Kosovo, Timor-Leste and Georgia. Recently, we are also committed to taking part in the proposed United Nations mission in Liberia.

The people of Iraq have inherited a civilization that is ancient and one of the most glorious. The present situation in Iraq should be resolved while preserving the interests of the people of Iraq and ensuring long-term peace, security and stability in the region. Bangladesh reiterates its support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the country. We stand ready to take part in the reconstruction and rebuilding of Iraq in the true spirit of brotherhood that characterizes the relationship between our two nations and peoples. We reiterate our call for ensuring a clear, effective and credible role for the United Nations in Iraq's transition to democracy and in the country's reconstruction. Bangladesh supports the forthcoming international conference on Iraq's reconstruction to be convened by the United Nations, and we look forward to a successful outcome.

The recent developments in the Middle East are extremely worrying. It is clear that the progress made from Oslo to Madrid and the present is now seriously threatened. The road map that the Palestinian side accepted with great courage has not been seriously accepted or implemented by the other side. Preconditions have been imposed, making peace difficult. The Israeli practices that are well known to the Assembly continue to be applied in occupied Palestine. There are gross and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights. The vicious and criminal announcement of the intention to expel and even assassinate President Yasser Arafat calls for global condemnation in the strongest possible terms. All of that runs counter to the global demand for the peaceful settlement and establishment of a Palestinian State to live as a good neighbour in peace and security.

Bangladesh reiterates its support for the early establishment of a sovereign, independent State of Palestine in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We call for a more active role on the part of the United Nations, and we ask the Security Council to assume its responsibilities towards the people of Palestine. We urge the diplomatic Quartet to intensify its efforts to prevent further escalation and to

address the threats against President Arafat, a Nobel Peace laureate and the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people. We urge that the peace process be placed back on track. We call for renewed efforts aimed at a comprehensive solution of the Middle East issues within a given time frame.

International terrorism remains a scourge. In the post-11 September 2001 context, it has taken centre stage in our global concerns. We reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Bangladesh is party to several international conventions on combating terrorism, and we are in the process of acceding to the remaining ones. We are actively involved in the elaboration of an additional protocol to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. The protocol will strengthen the Convention by incorporating provisions that include those contained in recent Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1373 (2001). Bangladesh attaches great emphasis on disarmament. We believe that it is closely related to international peace and security and has a direct relationship with development. Bangladesh is party to all international disarmament treaties covering nuclear, biological, chemical and conventional weapons. Seeking general and complete disarmament is our constitutional commitment. International peace and security, human security and the security of our planet have been the prime considerations in making our policy choices.

We have supported all efforts at disarmament. We continue to believe in the value of all measures, even partial efforts at arms control and disarmament. Our conviction has been vindicated by our progress in the control and ban of a number of weapons. The multilateral track, including the Conference on Disarmament, needs to be revived.

Bangladesh has renounced all weapons of mass destruction — biological, chemical and nuclear. The situation along the borders of the two nuclear-armed South Asian countries has been a matter of global concern. As a close neighbour, we too have a legitimate cause for concern. In this context, we applaud the Secretary-General for his recent call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. The imperatives, in view also of the threats to the existing regimes and their implications, do not require elaboration in this House. We would thus urge a renewed consideration of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion and the report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

In our region, as elsewhere, particularly since we are challenged by abject poverty, hunger, illiteracy, lack of safe drinking water and disease, our priorities should be socio-economic development, not nuclearization. We need to foster cooperation, not prepare for confrontation.

It is with this thought that our late President Shaheed Ziaur Rahman conceived of institutionalized regional cooperation leading to the emergence of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We firmly believe in the value and indeed the imperative of cooperation in our region. We hope that together we shall also be able to establish a peaceful, friendly and prosperous South Asia. We would draw inspiration from other parts of the world where such regional economic integration has worked well for the people of those regions.

In today's world, perhaps the most potential sources of conflict of interest within countries and among them would centre on natural resources, in particular, fresh water. We call for management of shared resources without depriving or causing damage to the economy or ecology of any of the countries concerned or the region.

For example, any unilateral withdrawal of water from international rivers should be prohibited, as such action would cause great damage to the environment, agriculture, industry and the overall economy and ecology of other countries. All actions in such areas should conform to international law and the norms of equity, justice and, of course, fair play. Any decision with regard to shared natural wealth should be through consultation among all concerned countries.

Bangladesh identifies itself closely with the problems of Africa. We believe in the efficacy of South-South cooperation as a mutually beneficial practice among societies at comparable stages of development. The launching of the African Union has been inspiring and that of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), encouraging. We are confident that the leadership of Africa and its people will succeed in transforming the continent into a peaceful and prosperous one.

We have developed greater knowledge, special bonds and closer friendship with many African nations

through our participation in their democracy and nation-building efforts and through peacekeeping and development activities. Bangladesh will continue to work together with them in addressing the challenges of building durable peace and sustainable development.

The specific problems facing the landlocked and small island developing countries require special attention. We hope the Almaty Conference has created a fresh impetus to address their needs. We must also accord support to countries that are in the process of transition in their economies.

The 1990s have seen a series of major United Nations conferences. Each has adopted an elaborate implementable programme of action with clear and specific responsibilities at national, regional and international levels. The International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg, and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which met in Brussels, have reinforced the earlier commitments. Now is the time to focus our efforts — individual and collective — to implementing the programmes of action emanating from those Conferences.

The United Nations has, in recent years made significant progress in reforming itself in organizational and substantive terms. Further progress remains to be achieved in various areas, including the Security Council, where reforms are essential to make the Council more representative, democratic and effective.

Also in need for further reform are the General Assembly and other major organs, including the Trusteeship Council, which could be revived. We need certainly to go further. Bangladesh welcomes the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent persons for examining the challenges to peace and security. We look forward to their report. In this regard, we would underline the importance of preserving multilateralism and consensus.

Decisions on budget cuts must not compromise the functioning of the Organization and budgetary exercises must not adversely affect the interests of the developing countries, in particular the least developed ones. There should be adequate provision for mandated activities in the developing countries.

It will remain our goal to bring the United Nations to the centre of global development efforts. The Economic and Social Council can play a crucial role in this regard. It must examine innovative and creative methods in its work. Bangladesh has sought election to the Economic and Social Council during the current session. As we have done in the past, Bangladesh seeks to contribute, as a member of the Council, to the pursuit of the United Nations social and economic agenda. We hope we shall receive valuable support from all Members of the Assembly.

The Millennium Development Goals set a number of achievable targets in the most pressing areas. Bangladesh is committed to achieving them for our people. We shall also work closely with all other nations so that these objectives are realized equally for all of us. But we aspire to go beyond. We urge continued focus on the implementation of the outcome of the 1990s cycle of international conferences. They represent a comprehensive agenda for humanity for our century. We must follow up on them for our present and future generations and for the progress of humankind. Let us all try to create a better world for all generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Kitts and Nevis, His Excellency The Honourable Timothy Harris.

Mr. Harris (Saint Kitts and Nevis): My Government is pleased that the General Assembly's presidency at its fifty-eighth regular session is in the capable hands of my distinguished colleague, the Foreign Minister of Saint Lucia, Senator Julian Hunte, whose election bears witness to the importance that this Organization holds, not just for the Government of Saint Lucia, but also for the Governments and people of the Caribbean Community. I trust that as he tackles the critical United Nations agenda over the coming year he will incorporate into his work the lessons of our successes as a Caribbean Community. As with his predecessor, whose steady leadership was tested during a year of unprecedented challenges, he, too, can count on my Government's continued support.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, other staff of the United Nations and the citizens of Iraq who lost their lives or sustained injuries in the tragedy of Baghdad last August. We

share the sorrow of the Secretary-General and his staff, and extend our profound condolences to the bereaved families.

I intend to focus our attention on the critical importance of strategic partnership. Lest my statement be misconstrued, I hasten to assure the Assembly from the outset that my Government is neither oblivious nor indifferent to the multitude of concerns and problems that attend and threaten our quest for international peace and security. I will be pleased to share my Government's perspective on them later. But allow me first to share with the Assembly our national philosophy and policy as they relate to improving the human condition.

"How does one do that?" you ask. Improving the human condition is achieved by working towards human security. Notwithstanding the recriminations and blame, at the core of the failed World Trade Organization round in Mexico earlier this month was the issue of human security. Clearly, countries want guarantees as Governments struggle to meet the needs of their citizens. For my Government, human security means that each citizen has the right to liberty, education, employment, an improved standard of living and economic development. We believe that human security is a comprehensive and holistic concept that encompasses all aspects of the human condition.

Obviously, there is much that we in the Caribbean can and must still learn from the rest of the world. But, equally, there are many valuable lessons that the rest of the world can draw from our experiences and successes in the Caribbean. In many areas, the Caribbean is a testament to the practicality and efficacy of functional cooperation, and of how, despite the many issues that divide us, we continue to work together on matters common to us. Be it at the subregional level of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) or within the broader Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the progress we have made in forging consensus and in building common institutions to address our shared problems allows us to be able to share best practices with the United Nations and demonstrate how, by working together through cooperative partnerships, each of us can achieve more.

For nearly four decades, for example, the University of the West Indies has cultivated many distinguished academics and other notables. Today, it stands as a beacon of hope for our young people in their quest for quality higher education. To its credit, the University continues to work with several internationally recognized institutions and agencies in the areas of peace and security, health care and scientific research, to name but a few. The Caribbean Examinations Council has responded adequately and with requisite standards of excellence to the growing education needs of the English-speaking Caribbean. When our students complete their education, they stand shoulder to shoulder with their counterparts around the world. It is not my intention to boast, but for us it is a matter of national and regional pride. Further, as the Assembly's President is aware, many of our countries have adopted policies that allow nationals of other member States to travel to and work in their countries without the hassle of visa requirements and work permits. Although we are divided by the sea, the bridges of commitment and recognition of our common challenges and the benefits of shared approaches are bringing us ever closer together.

The Caribbean Development Bank and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank are models of how financial responsibility and cooperation with and among member Governments in executing fiscal and monetary policies can facilitate stability, underpin accountability and engender progress. For decades, the Eastern Caribbean dollar, the currency of the countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, has remained the bedrock of monetary stability. We are also especially proud of the success of the OECS Court of Appeal, which has worked effectively and dutifully in dispensing justice throughout the territories over which it exercises jurisdiction. Further, the prudent and positive steps toward a Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), provide evidence of the determination of Caribbean Governments to cooperate in almost all endeavours to advance the human security of our citizens. These are but a few examples of functional cooperation. In every case, member countries are better off because they work together rather than unilaterally.

We continue to incorporate in our national policies many of the agreed principles of sustainable development. Additionally, our regional campaign to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS and treat its victims has witnessed encouraging results under the Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS. My Government wishes to commend the World Bank and the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation for their pledges of support for

our work in this regard. We hope that our cooperation efforts will be a model for future partnerships in our region and beyond.

I promised earlier that I would share my Government's perspective on some of the decisive issues that confront us internationally. I preface my remarks with a reminder that just over a decade earlier we stood on the threshold of a new era of opportunity. We celebrated the collapse of major ideological conflicts, which previously held us captive, even, I dare say, on the brink of nuclear Armageddon. As one leader remarked, nations and peoples quietly harboured dreams that the last decade of the twentieth century and the advent of the twenty-first century would herald new opportunities to address and redress asymmetrical issues that had frustrated our collective aspirations and individual potential. None of us, I am sure, would likely admit that we may have squandered such prospects. However, a little more than a decade later, ideological rifts seem to have been replaced by political chasms and new dangers.

Consequently, we must re-evaluate our concept of security. The Organization of American States, in its meeting of foreign ministers last year in Barbados, took the bold and timely step of redefining security within its hemisphere. Security, the foreign ministers declared, is diverse in scope and multidimensional in nature, requiring multifaceted approaches to address political, economic, social and environmental issues. This concept clearly recognizes that we cannot separate national, regional and international security issues from political, economic and social stability and their security implications.

We in the Caribbean recognize that, whereas globalization is a viable instrument of growth and prosperity for some, it has become the vehicle of ruin and despair for many of the already poor people around the world. While countries that prosper praise globalization and free trade, countries that suffer see themselves as no more than the guinea pigs, the passive objects of globalization, with very little hope of advancing human security for their poor citizens.

How do we encourage our citizens to have faith in a system that punishes their legitimate efforts? How can we tell the poor farmers in the developing world, struggling to eke out an existence, to hold out hope when farmers in rich countries are subsidized and rewarded for overproduction? How do we ask our citizens in small vulnerable economies to sacrifice and adopt free trade wholesale, while larger, more developed economies devise new ways to deny them crucial market access. Unless we address such inequities, there will always be resentment and mistrust. We must therefore work together to level these bumps on the road to development. Also, we must rob the uncivil forces of the arguments they use to feed and exploit the anger and despair of the poor and dispossessed.

I turn now to the United Nations. In our view, the United Nations remains central to international peace and human security. The myriad challenges facing us today require collective action and partnership. I hasten to add that, although the United Nations still lacks important elements of transparency and democracy in the operations of the Security Council, it nevertheless represents the most practical framework our nations have to address regional and international concerns in a holistic manner.

I trust that, when the dust of discontent settles, we will appreciate that no country can act alone in pursuit of international peace, development and human security. My Government calls on the United Nations membership to embrace a bold vision and commitment to fighting the pull of isolation and the lure of economic and financial engineering. Our reality today encompasses the struggles to find positive and sustainable methods for advancing our citizens' development against uncivil forces or rogue ideologies working relentlessly to undermine them.

My Government calls on the United Nations and Member Governments to further subscribe to and promote partnership by fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Goals are essential steps to improving the human condition. They are also a reliable basis for addressing many of the inequities of globalization. We urge Member States to work to meet these goals. We can relent only when the other half of the world's population ceases to live in abject poverty, when larger sectors of the world's population can find work, and when all parents are able to send their children to school.

Despite its exclusion from this international fraternity of nations, the Republic of China on Taiwan remains a valuable partner for peace and development with fullest respect for international law. We trust that its contributions and its citizens' right to adequate

representation can be guaranteed in the best interest of brotherhood so that all people can live in peace and enjoy the fruits of prosperity through partnership. Saint Kitts and Nevis therefore urges the United Nations to avail itself of every possibility to facilitate a sustainable resolution of the impasse that hampers Taiwan's efforts to engage in international dialogue and contribute to the common interests of mankind.

Let me end by reaffirming my Government's commitment to multilateralism and to strategic partnership.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maria de Fátima Lima Veiga, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities of the Republic of Cape Verde.

Mrs. Veiga (Cape Verde) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): Let me at the very outset offer my warm congratulations to Mr. Hunte on his election to preside over this fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. With his proven skills in the field of international affairs and his wide-ranging experience, we are confident that we will deal effectively with the many crucial tasks facing this Assembly. I assure him of the full support and best wishes of my delegation as he carries out the tasks of his high office.

Let me also extend our appreciation to the outgoing President, Mr. Jan Kavan, whose committed efforts guided the fifty-seventh session of this Assembly.

I wish to express my delegation's appreciation for the indefatigable efforts of the Secretary-General to preserve and enhance the role of our Organization last year, which proved to be one of the most difficult in its existence. One sad sign of this was the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last month, which took the lives of Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 other persons of different nationalities. It was a monstrous act that deserved strong and universal condemnation. Nothing could justify such a senseless attack against the civil personnel of a mission whose aims were none other than to help the Iraqi people to face the tragic situation in which they are living. We thus pay our respectful homage to the memory of those dedicated persons who lost their lives in the tragedy.

My country fully cooperates with the United Nations bodies in the struggle against terrorism and organized crime. However, the fight against terrorism should not lead the international community to downplay the importance of promoting development and fighting poverty and everything associated with it, including hunger, illness, illiteracy and environmental degradation. Nor should the international community forget the need to guarantee the respect of the rights of peoples and individuals, combat discrimination and all its aspects that deprive human beings of their dignity.

Very relevant proposals concerning the future of our Organization have been presented by the Secretary-General. He stressed the need to accelerate the reform of the United Nations by adapting it to the realities of the world in which we live, namely addressing the question of enlarging the Security Council and increasing the number of its permanent members, strengthening the General Assembly and reinvigorating the role of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as of the United Nations as a whole, including its relationship with the Bretton Woods institutions.

By their size, economic power, regional and international influence, there are obvious candidates to become permanent members of the Security Council. Their weight in international affairs can no longer be overlooked. We should not lose sight of the fact that their contributions to peace, security and development can bring more legitimacy to the body. The time is ripe to welcome those countries in an enlarged and more representative Security Council, in which Africa should have at least two permanent seats.

Being a member of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), Brazil should, in our view, take a permanent seat in the Council.

The issues relating to the reform of the United Nations have been the subject of a longstanding debate that points to an overwhelming consensus among Member States. My delegation supports the proposals made by the Secretary-General and hopes that the momentum provided by acknowledgement of the challenges, threats and dangers faced by the world will be seized by this Assembly and instil its members with the sense of urgency to come up with appropriate binding and pragmatic decisions relating to these issues.

As the President of the Assembly rightly pointed out in his inaugural speech, "Many developing countries do not have a wide range of development choices available to them and in fact face serious challenges due to their special circumstances."

Among these developing countries the international community recognized small island developing states as a special case of development and environment. It will be during the mandate of the current President of the General Assembly that, by happy coincidence, an international meeting will be held in Mauritius to assess the state of implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

Earlier this month, Cape Verde hosted the second regional preparatory meeting in anticipation of the Mauritius event. In this context, I would like to underline the meaning of my country's commitment to the process of global support to the sustainable development of small island developing states, a process to which my Government is fully dedicated.

The SIDS denomination has now been in existence for nearly a decade. The work accomplished by the United Nations toward a greater international awareness of the problems of small island developing states has been generally successful.

I take this opportunity to express my Government's gratitude to the entire United Nations system for the central role it has played in cultivating and maintaining the high degree of international awareness that is essential to our countries.

However, the recognition of a special category of countries cannot be justified for the purposes of classification alone. One would expect that the special designation would lead to some minimal amount of special treatment of the countries concerned, commensurate with their specific disadvantages and handicaps. Regrettably that is not the case with the small island developing states. In fact, island-specific special treatment is almost non-existent, even though many SIDS are in dire need of greater differentiation in the current pattern of international cooperation.

I therefore wish to convey my Government's hope that the Barbados Programme of Action +10 process, culminating in the Mauritius international meeting, will constitute a landmark in the history of the differentiated treatment of developing countries, particularly small island developing States.

The need for special consideration that is most commonly shared by small island developing states is the need to see market-access preferences preserved, not eroded. Such a need is not a luxury, but a prerequisite for many SIDS in their efforts to maintain competitiveness and economic viability in response to the structural disadvantages resulting from their remoteness and small size.

While several SIDS do enjoy a fair amount of special treatment, such as the treatment derived from least developed country (LDC), African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) or African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) status, there are still areas of international cooperation in which the absence of reference to island status is difficult to understand. One of these areas — of direct relevance to the question of trade preferences — is the ongoing debate in the World Trade Organization concerning the Work Programme on Small Economies, a debate in which small island developing states, regrettably, have not been able to advocate their case under the SIDS designation.

Cape Verde has again been deemed to qualify for graduation from least developed country (LDC) status under the criteria and graduation rules used by the Committee for Development Policy and the Economic and Social Council. As stressed by my delegation in the substantive session of the Council in July, we feel that a decision to graduate Cape Verde from least developed country status at this juncture would give the international community a gravely incorrect impression of our structural progress and prosperity, whereas Cape Verde remains one of the most economically vulnerable and aid-dependent countries in the world.

Here we are faced with a peculiar paradox: in the context of its support to small island developing states the United Nations system recognizes the permanent handicaps of a country, but, at the same time, it is considering withdrawing the special treatment this country has been eligible for, without leaving any alternative treatment available.

In this context, and in the light of the international recognition of the special handicaps of small island developing states, my Government urges the General Assembly to request the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to re-examine with care the rule whereby a least developed country would be seen as qualifying for graduation. We believe that such re-

examination ought to result in a methodological reform that will do justice to the least developed small island developing States.

Africa has made a remarkable effort to respond positively to the call of the international community and its own peoples to foster development, promote democracy, transparency, good governance, the rule of law and accountability. In the wake of this call African leaders agreed to establish the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in whose success we are all engaged in order to lead our continent out of poverty and conflict, ushering in a new era of prosperity and peace. Its adoption not only by the African Governments and civil societies but also by the international community as a framework for African development will help establish common goals and clear commitments that will lead our continent on a promising new journey. We believe that the NEPAD project should pay special attention to the situation of the island States.

Noticeable progress has been achieved, both in the manner of installing democratic Governments throughout the continent and in putting an end to conflicts.

In this particular case, we are heartened by the recent accord between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army. This constitutes a very significant step towards putting an end to the suffering of the Sudanese people. If, as we all anxiously hope, this agreement brings peace to that great African nation, it will add to the successes already registered in Mozambique, Angola and Sierra Leone, along with the ongoing processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Great Lakes and Liberia.

We must be cautious, however. Conflicts result from unsettled social and political issues. If these are not adequately tackled, the risk of new conflicts will persist. It is important to recall that democracy and the rule of law can develop unhindered only when and if the minimum conditions for survival are assured for the populations and when the rights of individuals and groups, including minorities, are respected.

The events in Guinea-Bissau two weeks ago illustrate the fragility of the institutions in a country that cannot address the basic problems of its population. While it may be true that political leaders must be held accountable for not ensuring good governance, in an environment of poverty, lack of resources and indebtedness good governance is easily set aside. These events point to the need for a stronger commitment of the international community to helping countries in distress face the tasks of fighting poverty, consolidating democratic institutions and promoting economic and social development not only with promises and advice, but also with concrete means.

Notwithstanding the serious threats that hover over mankind, a safer, more just and more peaceful world is now within reach of our living generations. Never before has mankind had such an array of means to face the great challenges that continue to defy humankind, such as hunger, poverty, illiteracy and curable diseases. Hunger is a case in point. Several experiences in different regions of the world prove that hunger can be eliminated if there is determination and available resources. It is therefore unacceptable that, in a world awash with food, one in three sub-Saharan Africans should continue to suffer from chronic hunger.

Last July, at the second ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union, held in Maputo, Mozambique, heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted a Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa. In this Declaration, African leaders once again demonstrated their firm commitment to combating hunger on the African continent.

At the national level, fighting hunger was set as one of the main priorities of the first Government of Cape Verde immediately after independence and continues to have a prominent place in Government policies in the framework of poverty reduction strategies. That is why we support the plea made by the President of Brazil to establish a world committee to fight hunger.

Three years ago, world leaders endowed themselves with the important political tool that is the Millennium Declaration. There is no excuse for the fact that the promised resources and the proclaimed will have not been put to work to achieve and even surpass the arduously negotiated but unanimously agreed Goals adopted in this very Hall. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties looming over the Organization, the eyes of the world are focused on the United Nations because all believe that our Organization can and should be the vehicle for achieving those Goals. Let us work together to make it happen.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Harmodio Arias, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the President of the Republic of Panama, Mireya Elisa Moscoso Rodríguez, and on my own behalf, I extend my warmest congratulations to Mr. Hunte on his election as President of the General Assembly at this session. The delegation of Panama is deeply gratified that he has been appointed to guide our debates, because he represents here the commitment of developing countries, and in particular those of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to multilateral efforts to achieve peace, respect for human rights, and sustainable development.

Stability and security, in their broadest sense, are things to which all humanity aspires. We will never achieve these objectives, however, if, in attempting to shape this new world, we counter the aspirations of our peoples or attempt to base it on the systematic development of grand military alliances. Human security, which is sought by all States, large and small, depends exclusively on our dedication to the collective security architecture that we have concentrated in the United Nations. Our duty, then, is to defend and strengthen at all costs our Organization's objectives and purposes, in particular the integrity and authority of our international legal system.

The world has been through an extraordinary experience this year, one that was hotly debated and the fallout from which is still far from clear. It is not too much to say that the negotiations over the events in Iraq that were felt here in the United Nations and beyond have had a number of repercussions both on the internal work of this Organization and on the conduct of international relations.

Nevertheless, Panama is convinced that the differences that were aired in the Security Council are a clear demonstration that it has functioned as it should; that the diversity of opinions and approaches that exist in the world were aired there without reservations; and that, although differences remained at the end of the process, it had the marginal benefit of highlighting the measurement and control requirements that must be taken into account in the Security Council.

Apart from these differences, the Security Council acted appropriately in establishing a pragmatic relationship with the occupying Powers in Iraq by means of resolution 1483 (2003) of May 22. In addition, our Organization is demonstrating that it has an irreplaceable role to play in the humanitarian field, just as it has in the political, diplomatic, economic and financial spheres.

The shocking slaughter that took place in Baghdad on 19 August and the killings of 22 September — painful acts of terrorism that took the lives of many national and international civil servants of the United Nations, including Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello — must move us to consider and adopt urgent measures to ensure that the international community takes concerted action as soon as possible towards the reconstruction of Iraq. To all their colleagues and to the great United Nations family, we express the most sincere condolences of Mireya Moscoso, President of Panama, her Government and the people of Panama.

During the Millennium Summit, Panama asked Member States, among other things, to return to the original spirit of the United Nations Charter. Consistent with that request, we hope that all of us will accept the obligation to reconcile ourselves with the general interests of the international community and to avoid acting solely in light of our particular strategic, military or political interests.

We repeat that request today, and call attention to the urgent need for strengthening the multilateral system as the guarantee of stability and security, which are fundamental for peaceful coexistence. Today, perhaps more than ever before, we must tackle the task of reforming our Organization so that the General Assembly can fulfil its proper function as the principal political body, and the Security Council can have a greater capacity to deal with the new challenges that the end of the cold war has brought with it.

To achieve this objective, Panama stresses the contents of the Declaration on the Strengthening of the United Nations and Security Council Reform, adopted at the Eleventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, which met at Asunción, Paraguay, in August 1997, calling upon Member States of the United Nations to correct the present imbalances in the composition of the Security Council, improve its decision-making mechanisms, and bring greater transparency to the conduct of its work.

We firmly believe that an extremely important element in this and other tasks facing us is the announcement by the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, that he will establish a high-level panel comprising eminent personalities from all regions of the world. Panama and the world congratulate him on having proposed this initiative.

We also wish to have the General Assembly become the forum in which to seek a solution to the problem between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. As Panama has noted on previous occasions, Taiwan has, in a sense, been left hanging in time and space, protected and yet unprotected. Recently, in response to the need to combat the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic, the World Health Organization was able to provide direct and effective assistance to Taiwan without violating or weakening the fundamental elements of the positions of the parties to that controversy. We believe that the United Nations system could act in several ways to help the People's Republic of China and Taiwan resolve their dispute in a peaceful way, while we fulfil our most cherished objective of responding, without exception, to the social needs of humanity.

Last July we held here the first Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We are still quite far from achieving our objectives, both nationally and internationally, but we believe that that biennial meeting injected new vigour into the efforts that we must all make to keep our commitments.

We repeat our position, put forward at that meeting, that the purposes and code of conduct put before Member States in the first two articles of the Charter must be crucial for securing peace and understanding among the nations of the world.

We would also stress that the massive clandestine trafficking in small arms and light weapons, which fuels internal conflicts, dictatorships, guerrilla movements and international terrorism, can only be blocked through close international cooperation. With equal determination, we must pursue the networks of traffickers in narcotics and diamonds, which use bogus firms and banks, thrive by corrupting public officials and are constantly working to destroy our societies.

In a follow-up to the Monterrey Summit, we in the countries of the South renew our call for creating a more just and efficient financial system, for eliminating the inequities of globalization and financing for development, and for raising the depressed prices of our raw materials and other export products. As we have stated on previous occasions, there is also an urgent need to agree on the proper mechanisms for forestalling financial crises and finding a solution to unsustainable external debt burdens, in accordance with resolution 57/240.

We now approach the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, which will be held in this city on 29 and 30 October 2003. We must seize this opportunity to reinvigorate this part of our activity, and to review the progress achieved in ensuring effective Secretariat support, pursuant to resolution 57/273.

At the second meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, it was decided to create a working group to prepare and submit a draft text for negotiation among Member States and accredited observers.

Panama's position is represented in the Declaration of Quito of 11 April 2003, which, in brief, called for promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of the 600 million persons living with disabilities around the world, the great majority of whom suffer constantly from poverty and lack of understanding. The international convention that we seek, as noted in the Declaration, must reflect "the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights and the principle of non-discrimination." These concepts are thoroughly established in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights agreements and other related instruments.

It is timely to refer here to the persistent and growing worldwide HIV/AIDS pandemic. Latin American and Caribbean countries, too, are confronted with a serious situation in this area. The Pan American Health Organization met in Washington on 11 June to address this issue, and noted that the demographic and social impact of HIV/AIDS in our region threatens to undermine the ability to carry out development projects.

We therefore call on the United Nations system to make available to Latin America and the Caribbean adequate resources to prevent this scourge. As is well

known, our region today has some 2.5 million people suffering from this terrible disease.

It is clear that the moral and technical presence of the United Nations is essential in efforts to eradicate political, racial and religious intolerance and in support of negotiations for pacification, reunification, self-determination and reconstruction, in order to ensure that the peoples concerned can enjoy the benefits of development.

Having said this, I urge our Organization to find expeditious ways of helping those who are committed to the so-called road map for resolving the conflict between Palestine and Israel to secure the active cooperation of the countries of the region and of the Governments of Israel and the Palestine National Authority, so as to overcome the current scepticism over any imminent possibility of seeing the two peoples living in peace, within secure boundaries, as two sovereign States.

Ensuring that that urgent task is carried out successfully will require the ongoing participation of all of the neighbouring States. They must demonstrate a joint willingness to become guarantors of the stability and security of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and guardians of strict adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and to Security Council resolutions.

I would like to conclude by referring briefly to the International Criminal Court. With the election of its Judges and Prosecutor, the Court has become a reality. We recognize the concern that has been aroused, particularly among the States parties to the Rome Statute, by the fact that the Security Council, in its resolution 1487 (2003), renewed for one year the provisions of resolution 1422 (2002) with regard to immunity in cases relating to peacekeeping operations, as well as by the fact that bilateral immunity agreements have been negotiated separately by several countries on the basis of article 98 of the Statute.

Panama, a firm supporter of the International Criminal Court, believes that these pragmatic agreements are a response to a temporary situation, and that they cannot and must not detract from the purposes and objectives of the Rome Statute. As States parties, we cannot shrink from the obligations imposed by our domestic jurisdictions in matters relating to war crimes, and we are therefore convinced that the political concerns and suspicions of today will disappear as it becomes apparent that persons who commit monstrous crimes against humanity can never be shielded by any State or protected by dreams of impunity. Any State that holds to a different interpretation on this point will be swimming against the tide of human progress and international law.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan.

Mr. Ismail (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to begin my statement with a quotation from the Koran:

"O mankind! We created

You from a single (pair)

Of a male and a female,

And made you into

Nations and tribes, that

Ye may know each other

(Not that ye may despise

(Each other). Verily

The most honoured of you in the sight of Allah

Is (he who is) the most

Righteous of you." (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

Peace be upon you.

I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I should also like to express the gratitude of my delegation to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan.

We would like to express our appreciation for the important role that the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, continues to play in revitalizing the work of the Organization. In this connection, we welcome his ideas regarding the institutional reform of the Organization. I would also like to take this opportunity to express to the United Nations our heartfelt condolences for the untimely deaths of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues.

When I addressed the Assembly from this rostrum last year, I made clear that my Government and my country were eager to achieve peace in the Sudan. I am very pleased, therefore, to inform the

Assembly that our words have been matched with deeds, and peace is now on the horizon — peace that will put an end to an armed conflict that has squandered the human and natural resources of the country and hindered the development of the Sudanese people.

My country has continuously reiterated its desire for dialogue and negotiation with the Sudan People's Liberation Army Movement (SPLM). Our efforts, together with those of the mediators, have been continuing for more than 10 years and have recently been crowned with success in the form of an agreement by both parties as a result of an initiative put forward by the countries of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, under the patronage of the sisterly country, Kenya, and with much appreciated positive support by the IGAD partners.

At the most recent round of negotiations, His Excellency Mr. Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, First Vice-President, led the Government delegation, and Mr. John Garang led the SPLM delegation. Four days ago, it resulted in an agreement on security arrangements and the extension of a ceasefire. It is expected that that agreement will pave the way for a final round of negotiations that will lead to just and lasting peace throughout the Sudan as soon as possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the IGAD member countries for the role they played in the Sudan peace process, under the stewardship of the President of Kenya and his special envoy. Our thanks and appreciation also go to IGAD partners, namely the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Italy and Norway. We would like to express particular gratitude for the positive intervention of the Government of the United States of America at the most critical juncture in the negotiation process. We also appreciate the considerable efforts that Egypt and Libya have continued to make in the interests of peace in the Sudan, as well as those of the Arab League and the African Union.

We are confident that Members will understand how important the ceasefire agreement is for the humanitarian situation. The report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in the Sudan demonstrates the extent of the progress made in this area. Next month will mark the one-year anniversary of the cessation of hostilities. Peace remains a basic requirement for the rehabilitation of the areas affected by war and will allow for the transition from humanitarian relief to comprehensive sustainable development.

Mr. Ekua Avomo (Equatorial Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We would like to reiterate our full conviction that the peace, security and stability of the countries of the region are directly linked with peace in the Sudan. That is why my country has endeavoured to heal the wounds of the past in its relations with neighbouring countries, in particular Egypt and Ethiopia. Our relationship with those two countries has moved beyond the reconciliation stage; we now have exemplary strategic security ties with them, thereby protecting the interests of our peoples and consolidating peace and security in the entire region.

We would like to express gratitude to our friends and brothers and to the United Nations in general for their humanitarian assistance during the conflict. We call upon the international community to help in the post-conflict reconstruction of our country and the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons and refugees, and to assist in the achievement of sustainable development in support of the fledgling peace.

It gives me great pleasure to tell the Assembly that we have made appreciable constitutional achievements that will open the door wide for participation by all the Sudanese people in all areas of political life. Economic plans and policies adopted by the Government have started to bear fruit, whether in the form of reduced levels of inflation, high rates of growth or the stabilization of exchange rates. We will continue to enhance those policies with a view to reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development within the framework of the 25-year comprehensive development strategy for the period 2003-2027.

In his report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General reminded us that, as the challenges facing us change, so must we alter our methods of dealing with them. It is high time, therefore, that we summon the political will to reform the Security Council by dealing with the double issues of membership and the right of veto so as to make it more representative and democratic in its membership and in its decision-making. While touching on Security Council reform, we warmly welcome Council

resolution 1506 (2003), which lifted the sanctions imposed against fraternal Libya. In that connection, we wish to stress the need to lift all unilateral sanctions, used as a means for the political and economic coercion of States. We urge the Security Council not to be quick to impose sanctions on countries, particularly the developing countries, because of their adverse impact on their people.

The high-level participation at this session to discuss various international issues is clear evidence of the General Assembly's importance. We strongly support its efforts to rearrange its priorities and agenda items, in order to improve the administrative and procedural aspects of its work, to enhance its relations with the Security Council, the highest organ in the United Nations, to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and to face ongoing challenges.

Another challenge of great concern to us lately is the increasing acts of terrorism. Terrorist acts that occurred in various parts of the world last year clearly prove that no country is immune to terrorism. All of us, regardless of our religion or beliefs, could be the victims of such crimes. As I mentioned earlier, terrorism has no religion or country. Hence, in order to face this grave threat, we need to reach an international consensus on its definition, root causes and means to combat it, under the auspices of our international Organization.

In that context, we express our support for the call of His Excellency Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, to convene an international conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, to address the issue of terrorism. In the context of its international and regional role, the Sudan will have the honour next year to host the Non-Aligned Movement ministerial conference. We hope that the conference will consider issues of collective security and challenges.

The deteriorating socio-economic situation of the least developed countries requires the international community to make every effort to extricate them from the labyrinth of poverty, hunger and disease. Our experience in the Sudan has proved that, regardless of their endeavours, the least developed countries cannot achieve the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action without substantial assistance from their development partners. I commend the tireless efforts of the High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries in mobilizing international support for initiatives on the subject. We join the appeal to the international community by His Excellency Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of Mozambique, as Chairman of the African Union, to extend support and assistance to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the framework adopted by the African continent and endorsed by the United Nations and donor countries as a tool for coping with development challenges in the continent.

I am pleased to inform members that the Sudan, as Chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), has tried its best to formulate policies and take steps that will further consolidate and promote links of cooperation between EGAD and COMESA member States. Such efforts are in line with the NEPAD initiative aimed at achieving peace, development and prosperity for the peoples of the entire African continent. To that end, a number of specialized conferences have been convened in the Sudan to address issues of economic cooperation, disarmament and combating terrorism, as well as issues of internally displaced persons and refugees, all with the aim of attaining the NEPAD goals.

Another agenda item subject that we think will negatively impact the future of humankind if not properly addressed is that of human cloning, which is now at the centre of a heated scientific, religious, legal and ethical debate. The Sudan strongly supports the call for an international convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings. We also condemn all medical ventures that disdain human dignity and the sanctity of the Creator.

Statements over the past few days clearly demonstrate the keen interest of the international community in maintaining international peace and security. While adding our voice to those calling for the revitalization of multilateral diplomacy, we also call for the prompt handling of the critical security and humanitarian situation in Iraq. Furthermore, we call for the empowerment of our Iraqi brothers so that they may exercise their right to sovereignty, as guaranteed to them by international law, and live in peace and harmony with their neighbours. It gives me pleasure to remind the Assembly of the important resolution adopted a few weeks ago by the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States, which recognized the

transitional Governing Council of Iraq. Such recognition is a significant step that will, hopefully, enable Iraq to regain its sovereignty and to play its regional and international role.

The question of Palestine has been a deep concern to the human conscience. For more than five decades, it has been a major threat to international peace and security. We have been firmly convinced that Israel's maintenance of a huge military presence, its aggression and its killing and suppression of the Palestinian people, will only aggravate a situation that is already deteriorating. The only viable way to achieve peace is to adhere to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and international law. The international community, particularly the influential parties in the peace process, are urged to exert pressure on Israel.

The conflict in Somalia has been a bleeding wound in the Horn of Africa and the time has come to stop that painful bleeding. We call upon the leaders of all Somali factions to join hands to preserve the unity and stability of their country, and to achieve development and prosperity for their people, in order to protect them from the scourge of war and fighting. We remain confident that the neighbouring and other interested countries will spare no effort to help reach an agreement that will preserve the unity, security and stability of Somalia.

The Sudan is now a genuine partner in the international efforts aimed at the prohibition of chemical weapons. One of the significant roles played by the Sudan in that regard was its hosting last August of the First Conference of the African National Authorities of the Chemical Weapons Convention States Parties. We are committed to implementing the recommendations adopted at the conference, particularly to creating a chemical-weapon-free zone in Africa and to enhancing international cooperation in the peaceful use of chemical materials.

I call upon the international community to make renewed efforts to declare the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and of all other weapons of mass destruction. That inflamed region must abide by international agreements banning nuclear weapons. The nuclear facilities of all States, without exception and with complete fairness, must be subjected to the comprehensive safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Here we recall, shortly after its fifth anniversary, the unjust bombing of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical and veterinary factory by the former United States Administration which claimed that it was used to manufacture weapons. It was a baseless accusation, as Members are aware, that has been refuted by American scientific and academic institutions before relevant international organizations. The Sudan's complaint is still alive in the Security Council. In that connection, I call upon the current United States Administration to rectify the serious mistake that it inherited from its predecessor, by compensating the Sudan morally and financially.

I hope that before the end of this session my country will finally bid farewell to the longest African conflict, an achievement that would enable the Sudan to play its role at the regional level and to contribute to the stability and sustainable development of the African continent.

In conclusion, I reaffirm our deep conviction that the United Nations is the sole, irreplaceable mechanism for administering and promoting international cooperation in all fields. Therefore, we should distance the United Nations from serving narrow interests and from attempts to exploit it to pursue special agendas. In that connection, we express our readiness and our commitment to assist the United Nations system in achieving the lofty goals enshrined in the Charter.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Marwan Muasher, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Muasher (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin by expressing warm congratulations to Mr. Julian Hunte on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I can assure him of the full cooperation of the Jordanian delegation to ensure the fulfilment of his mandate for the benefit of all peoples and nations. I should also like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his remarkable stewardship of the previous session.

A special tribute is due to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts dedicated to upholding the lofty goals of the Organization. Mr. Annan has been quite dynamic in his work to enhance this world body's effectiveness and to revitalize its functions, especially in the areas of international peace and security, human

rights and social and economic progress throughout the world.

I wish to express our heartfelt condolences to the Secretary-General as well as to the family of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and to those of all his colleagues who lost their lives as a result of the terrorist bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Iraq, a barbaric act that we all condemn.

The sad collapse of the Oslo process demonstrated that a revival of the Middle East peace process under the previous terms was no longer a viable option. Peace-making in the region requires a new modus operandi, as all transitional arrangements have failed to establish and build mutual confidence between the two sides and to meet the envisioned goals. Thus, the time has indeed come for a shift in approach. Instead of managing the conflict in a way that has led thus far to a perpetuation of the cycle of violence, our focus should be redirected onto the final objectives of the negotiations. Furthermore, it is no longer useful to concentrate only on security aspects without realizing that the problem is essentially political in nature and not only a question of security.

It was against that backdrop that George W. Bush, President of the United States, launched in June 2002 his vision for peace in the Middle East. On the basis of that initiative, the road map was formulated and announced. Jordan contributed to the development of the road map, which generated a real turnaround in the region's political landscape. It established a framework of mutual obligations, whose aim is to end the Israeli occupation and to establish an independent Palestinian state on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab peace initiative. The road map set forth a specific three-year time frame for the birth of a Palestinian State. Furthermore, it provided for the creation of a monitoring and assessment mechanism to ensure viable implementation according to specific timelines.

It was on the basis of that vision that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan welcomed the road map when it was formally announced by the Quartet. At the time, we expressed the hope that that impetus would help to restart the peace process on a solid foundation. However, Jordan also made it clear that the declaration in and of itself would be insufficient to create forward movement towards our objectives. What was additionally required was a genuine commitment on the part of the United States and the international community to implement that vision. True to our expectations, we sensed such a genuine commitment at the two recent Sharm al-Sheikh and Aqaba summits.

Jordan, in the meantime, fully recognizes that recent developments on the ground — especially the collapse of the ceasefire, or *hudna*, arrangement between the Palestinian groups and Israel — create severe and real risks and threats for the road map. Nonetheless, we should stay the course with a view to implementing the road map and putting an end to the occupation and the tragic killing of civilians on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The hard work that we are investing in this exercise is worthwhile given the potential risk of failure and the absence of political opportunity again. Such failure would make for a more dangerous and complex scenario than before and would jeopardize the interests and security of all actors.

On behalf of Jordan, I wish to urge from this world podium all stakeholders — especially the members of the Quartet — to pursue their efforts to ensure scrupulous implementation of the road map, without any modifications and in a way that guarantees by 2005 the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the termination of the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories occupied in 1967. All that would be in keeping with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab peace initiative, which is a key component of the road map and provides a framework for peace — a peace that is acceptable to all peoples of the region and fulfils their long-standing aspirations.

Along the same lines, we urge acceleration in the creation of an effective political and security monitoring mechanism to be operated by the Quartet. That is essential to ensure strict implementation of, and compliance with, without modifications, the respective obligations of both parties as set forth in the road map. To us, such a mechanism is an essential component on which we must insist, because we consider it to be a true point of departure that would enable us to take advantage of the historic window of opportunity and bring about comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the entire Middle East.

Regarding suicide attacks, I wish to reiterate that Jordan took a principled position repudiating and condemning such acts on both moral and political grounds. We maintain that those operations have done

harm to the Palestinian cause and have resulted in the erosion of international sympathy for it. Furthermore, they have shifted the global focus away from the core question of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the pressing need to end that occupation. Along the same lines, we condemn Israel's extrajudicial killing of Palestinian citizens. Let me stress once again that the prevailing atmosphere of violence will only play into the hands of extremists on both sides of the divide. Therefore, it is high time to implement the road map as accepted by all parties and to take bold and expeditious steps to place the entire peace process back on an irreversible track.

We call upon Israel to change its current security policy, which has failed to ensure security for the Israelis. Rather, Israel should move towards restoration of confidence with the Palestinian side partner side so that both can focus on the political process by engaging in a serious implementation of the road map. To this end, Israel must ease the suffering of the Palestinian people by lifting the closures on Palestinian communities, removing the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian leadership and by withdrawing its military forces from the cities occupied since September 2000, in compliance with Security Council resolution 1402 (2002).

In the same context, my Government condemns the decision taken by the Government of Israel to remove, in principle, from the occupied Palestinian territories, the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, who was legitimately elected by his people. In our view, this decision seriously imperils the peace process. We call on the Government of Israel to reverse its decision, which otherwise will plunge the entire region into a dangerous tunnel.

Jordan condemns the Israeli settlement activities that take the form of unabated construction of settlements on occupied Palestinian land. Israel must end these activities, which breach the basic norms of international law and, not least, impede ongoing efforts to put the peace process back on track. We demand that the Government of Israel start dismantling all settlements erected since March 2001. This is, after all, a binding obligation of Phase I of the road map.

We also condemn the separation wall, which consolidates Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, devours further Palestinian land, aggravates the suffering of the Palestinian population and anticipates as a fait accompli, the future shape of the Palestinian State. While we demand that Israel cease forthwith the construction of the wall, we stress the need to respect the status of the 4 June 1967 line.

Iraq has now entered a new phase during which the brotherly people of that country are facing enormous hardships and challenges. The eyes of all Iraqis are now set on the international community in the hope of receiving every possible assistance that would enable them to lay a solid foundation for building a promising future that would include reconstructing their country and regaining its status as an active member in the Organization and of the international community.

While we emphasize the need to safeguard the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq, to ensure the withdrawal of the foreign occupation forces as quickly as possible and to enable the people of Iraq to determine their future by themselves, we welcome the formation of the transitional Governing Council as a first and important step towards a broad-based Iraqi Government that represents the full spectrum of the Iraqi population, to be elected by the people of Iraq as expeditiously as possible on the basis of a constitution accepted and endorsed by them. Against this backdrop, we decided to deal positively with the Governing Council and with all political groups in Iraq. Let me elaborate that my Government has accepted the assumption by the representatives of the transitional Iraqi Government of the seat of Iraq in the League of Arab States on a temporary basis, based on the understanding that Iraq will subsequently move towards drafting its constitution and holding elections leading to the formation of a representative Iraqi Government.

We must also emphasize our condemnation of the violations of human rights and international law committed by the previous regime in Iraq, especially the crimes of assassination, mass killings and mass burials, including the execution of Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees.

At this juncture, I wish to underline the central role the United Nations must continue to play in Iraq. The United Nations should remain an active player in the forthcoming political process; its role should not be restricted to humanitarian issues only. Our Organization must assume the leading role in overseeing the political process in the forthcoming

stage, including the finalization of the drafting of the constitution and supervision of the elections to be held in order to form a sovereign Iraqi Government.

Jordan condemns in the strongest possible terms the cowardly terrorist attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Despite the immense tragedy suffered by the United Nations, we do have trust in the resolve and ability of the United Nations system to maintain its operations and assistance to the Iraqi people.

As you are all aware, the Jordanian Embassy complex in Baghdad was also a target of a vicious terrorist attack that claimed many innocent lives. Nonetheless, that appalling act reinforced our resolve to continue to reach out in every possible way to help our brothers in Iraq, in order to enable them to overcome the overwhelming odds they have been enduring.

Terrorism has proved to be a global phenomenon that cuts across national boundaries and is not exclusive to a particular region, language, religion or race. It is therefore imperative for all members and institutions of the world community to combat it and eradicate it. Let me assure the Assembly that the Government and people of Jordan are determined to confront this phenomenon which our citizens and institutions have suffered from for several decades. Once again, let me reiterate our firm commitment to cooperate with all countries and international efforts in the joint fight against terrorism.

We would like to express our full backing for the efforts aimed at achieving meaningful progress in the current negotiations in the General Assembly to adopt a comprehensive convention on combating terrorism and a convention on combating nuclear terrorism. We hope that these endeavors will prove successful in the formulation of a legal and specific definition of the concept of terrorism which would set it apart from the rights protected under international law and international humanitarian law for States, peoples and individuals.

For out part, Jordan repudiates all vicious falsehoods and sinister campaigns to smear Arabs and Muslims with the label of terrorism. This phenomenon is in complete contradiction of the true nature and meaning of the Islamic faith, which is anchored in the values of justice, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and reverence for humankind. Thus, we feel a pressing need to pay due attention to the role that the dialogue among civilization plays in consolidating understanding and coexistence among peoples and nations. It also helps in eliminating the causes of extremism that emanate from a lack of genuine knowledge and comprehension of the essence of religions and cultures that are based on disseminating a message of peace, understanding and acceptance of others.

The political and economic developments unfolding in this era of globalization and information technology prompt us to accelerate the process of political and economic openness in the developing countries. That will help in the evolution of stronger incentives for achieving further progress and stability. Such an environment will be more amenable to economic growth and will generate a stronger momentum to eradicate poverty and human suffering as we strive towards the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals.

In that context, democracy assumes a special relevance, especially since it is essentially an inherent process that evolves from the cultures and specific characteristics of societies. Therefore, it is virtually untenable to impose this concept on others in prescribed forms that might not be in concert with the cultural structures of those communities.

In Jordan, however, we are committed to pursue the path of democratic reforms and development of the national political process in all its aspects. In fact, that issue is quite high on our national agenda, and our expectation is that further progress will be made in the enhancement of our democratic institutions.

Bearing this in mind, Jordan will be guided by the conclusions outlined in the extremely valuable United Nations Development Programme report on Arab Human Development. We are grateful to the UNDP and its team of Arab experts for their analytical methods in identifying and profiling some pressing challenges currently facing the Arab world. Jordan views this publication with great interest and perceives it from an extremely positive perspective, given its merits in terms of data, analytical approach and practical and specific objectives as well as its valuable science-based conclusions and recommendations.

Our primary purpose should be how to improve the role and performance of the United Nations in all spheres of its operations. More specifically, that should

include strengthening its role in the areas of preventive diplomacy, the management of humanitarian crises, conflicts and wars, human rights violations, and the challenges associated with globalization and the development of humankind.

In that regard, Jordan welcomes the fact that the International Criminal Court is entering a new phase in terms of the election of its Judges and Prosecutor, which is a further step in the establishment of international justice and in how violations of international humanitarian law are treated. As the General Assembly is well aware, Jordan had the privilege of working hard to make significant contributions in support of the Court's creation and of the entry into force of its Statute.

In the same vein, Jordan takes pride in the election of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah to the Board of Directors of the Victims' Trust Fund established for the victims of crimes falling under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. The Fund is expected to have a tangible impact in alleviating the anguish of the victims of the most horrifying crimes and of their families.

With regard to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Jordan continues to attach great importance to this area of activity by the United Nations system. We are proud and privileged to participate with other Member States in those global operations in areas that have been afflicted by war, conflict and instability. However, to ensure the effective and complete fulfilment of the lofty objectives of the mandate of each peacekeeping operation, adequate budgetary funds must be ensured for the operations' smooth functioning, including on-time reimbursement of payments due to troop-contributing countries.

In closing, allow me once again to thank the President. I wish this session of the General Assembly every success as I pray to Allah, our Lord, to enable us, one and all, to live up to the responsibilities entrusted to us.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Professor S. Jayakumar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore.

Mr. Jayakumar (Singapore): I would like to congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte, the Foreign Minister of Saint Lucia, on his election as the new President of the General Assembly. Singapore is delighted that a fellow small island State and member of the Forum of Small States holds that office.

I also join others in paying a tribute to United Nations personnel who have fallen victim to violence or attacks, including a special tribute to the late Sergio Vieira de Mello. The terrorist attack that caused his death has outraged the entire civilized world. Sergio dedicated his life, and ultimately gave his life, in the service of the United Nations. He is mourned and missed by his many friends around the world. We can best honour his memory by reaffirming our commitment to the ideals that he served.

The run-up to the war in Iraq saw a heated debate about the role of the United Nations. The United Nations is, of course, no stranger to controversy, but that debate was notable for being framed in particularly stark terms. The rhetoric was inflamed and inflated. It has been variously asserted, with glee or gloom, that the United Nations was irrelevant or irreplaceable, a threat to national sovereignty, the sole source of international legitimacy, merely a tool of the remaining super-Power, or the only way to restrain that super-Power. There are indeed serious issues that require debate, but the simplistic manner in which that debate was framed — in particular the portrayal of a struggle between unilateralism and multilateralism — is, in my view, unhelpful. Unfortunately, that rhetoric has obscured, rather than clarified, the issue. It has oversimplified the debate and glossed over the more complex reality. The danger is that we may believe in the rhetoric and arrive at wrong conclusions about the relevance, or irrelevance, of the United Nations. I am therefore joining that debate with some trepidation, and I do so only to highlight some of the complexities, in the hope that it will contribute to a more balanced appraisal of the United Nations. I shall start by restating some basics.

In the 58 years since its formation, the influence and role of the United Nations in world affairs has always flowed and ebbed in accordance with shifting geopolitical tides. The role of the United Nations has been indispensable on some crucial international issues; on other occasions the United Nations has had no role, or only a marginal role. If that meant that the United Nations was irrelevant, then it was irrelevant long before the recent war in Iraq. The ability of the United Nations to act and the kinds of actions it took have always been contingent on how States, and in

particular the permanent members of the Security Council, perceived whether the United Nations served their interests. But the United Nations and the United Nations system have always endured.

Neither the variable fortunes nor the survival of the United Nations should surprise anyone. The United Nations functions in an international system consisting of sovereign States. Multilateralism and unilateralism were never mutually exclusive alternatives; they are different options in every State's menu of policy choices. Few States, large or small, would agree to entrust their security or other vital national interests entirely to a multilateral institution. On the other hand, no State, however powerful, can always succeed in achieving its objectives without the help of others. Every State will choose the option that serves its interest best.

Furthermore, the United Nations as a total system is bigger than the General Assembly and the Security Council. As we debate the future of international organizations we should not forget that the world has never been more interdependent, and therefore more in need of global governance. The United Nations now has more than 190 Members and has never been closer to the ideal of universal participation. There has never been a period in world history when there have been more international legal regimes and norms regulating State behaviour. The Secretariat is the depository for over 500 international treaties covering the entire spectrum of global activities.

International legal regimes and norms are imperfect in their efficiency and observance. Some international norms are hotly contested. Still, the conduct of international relations today does not take place in a vacuum, but within that framework of laws, rules, standards and norms. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that the maintenance of international peace and security is first among the purposes of the United Nations, and the most contested and controversial of its roles. It is also the focus of the current debate over Iraq. It is here that the rhetorical exaggerations I mentioned earlier stand most in the way of clear and rational thinking about the strengths and limitations of the United Nations.

Traditional international law recognizes only two grounds for the use of force: self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter and authorization by the Security Council. That seeming clarity is deceptive.

Even before the latest Iraq war, traditional interpretations of the Charter had been questioned. The doctrine of self-defence has long been the subject of learned debate. The current controversy over the right to pre-emption is only the latest manifestation. The doctrine of humanitarian intervention — or "responsibility to protect" — so boldly brought to the fore by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has for several decades challenged the conventional concepts of non-intervention and the sovereign equality of States.

Another challenge to traditional approaches has been the threat posed by non-State actors, especially the contemporary menace posed by perpetrators of international terrorism. The problem posed by rebel groups in civil conflicts is another example.

In its efforts to respond to egregious violations of human rights, starvation, anarchy and chaos, the Security Council had already stretched both the authority of the United Nations to intervene and the definition of "threats to the peace" and "aggression". The war in Iraq was not the first time, and will not be the last time, that the Security Council was unable to act. The hope of the late 1980s and early 1990s that the end of the cold war would at last enable the Security Council to discharge its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security has long been shattered.

In retrospect, Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait in 1990 represented an unusually clear-cut violation of fundamental Charter principles. That greatly eased the task of securing Security Council authorization for military action.

But the consensus on Iraq was short-lived. By 1994, France and Russia began to call for a road map for the lifting of sanctions. By 1998, the withdrawal of the United Nations Special Commission and Operation Desert Fox marked the end of the Security Council's consensus on Iraq. Thereafter the Security Council acted in accordance with a complex balance of principles and national interests, resulting in inconsistent and incoherent decisions. In the oil-for-food debates humanitarian concerns about the consequences of sanctions were mixed with the commercial and business interests of some of the permanent members.

That did not, however, make the Security Council irrelevant. It merely meant that the Council served as a forum for managing competing interests, an important

role that it has played for all its history. After all, while Security Council resolutions have the force of law, they are, at the end of the day, first and foremost political documents indicating the degree of consensus that can be achieved among its most powerful members at any one time.

I do not think that it is self-evident that the 2002-2003 clash of interests over Iraq was qualitatively different from the differences between the permanent members during the previous decade. I do not think that the disagreement over Iraq has permanently damaged the United Nations.

The 2002-2003 crisis over Iraq in the Security Council only underscored what we have known all along, namely, that the Security Council can authorize intervention only when the permanent members are in agreement, and that all States, big and small, will do what they must to protect their vital national interests.

This is not the occasion to revisit old debates over whether the war in Iraq was authorized on the basis of a continuity of authority from 1990 to 2003. Certainly, as resolution 1441 (2002) recognized, Iraq had been in material breach of several resolutions. My point is that, whatever its eventual outcome, the intense diplomatic effort to secure another explicit resolution for the use of force was itself testimony to the importance attached by all to the Security Council's legitimizing role. In May, only weeks after a formal end to major combat operations was declared, resolution 1483 (2003) was adopted without any dissenting vote, recognizing that the United Nations had a significant role in post-war Iraq.

More balanced views are now beginning to emerge, albeit still tainted by the bitterness of the debates in the run-up to the war. It will be some time before consensus can be reached on the role of the United Nations in post-war Iraq. Some are loath to grant ex post facto legitimization of military action. At the same time, there is reluctance to cede power won with blood. But the legitimacy that the United Nations brings is unique.

The debate on the role of the United Nations will continue. It can, and should, go on. But that does not mean that the United Nations should be in paralysis. We must at the same time press on with our commitment to fulfil the fundamental purposes of the United Nations, which, as stated in the Charter, are "To maintain international peace and security", "To develop friendly relations among nations" and "To achieve international cooperation".

The starting point for that effort must be acceptance of the fact that, while the United Nations stands for ideals that we must never relinquish, the reality is that the United Nations both reflects and shapes geopolitics. Underlying the debates in the run-up to the war, and still infusing the controversies, is acute uneasiness over the distribution of power in the post-cold war international system. But can the United Nations escape that reality? The fact is that the United Nations can operate only on the basis of a hard-headed appreciation of the realities of power. If we allow exaggerated rhetoric about the role of the United Nations to obscure that fact, then we do the United Nations a disservice.

The Charter of the United Nations has remained essentially unchanged since 1945. But it has been continuously interpreted and re-interpreted to meet changing geopolitical circumstances and new challenges, many of which were unforeseen by the founders of the United Nations.

Today we are again faced with radically new threats, not least of which are the global terrorist networks that respect neither national boundaries nor traditional international law. Clearly, the United Nations needs to fashion new and more flexible rules to deal with these new threats. Yet, at the same time, we must continue to ensure that there are adequate safeguards to prevent abuse or a return to the law of the jungle.

Finding the right balance between those equally urgent imperatives will not be easy. But it is not impossible, if we can find the discipline to debate the issues openly and realistically, with a clear appreciation of both the limitations and potential of the United Nations.

Recent events in Iraq have shown that the United States needs the United Nations. It is also a fact that the United Nations needs the United States. Since there is a convergence of interests for the two to cooperate in order to achieve our shared interests and objectives, it is surely not impossible for us to negotiate and agree upon a new paradigm of cooperation between the world's sole super-Power and the world's only, and indispensable, United Nations.

The United Nations is not a panacea for all the world's ills. Neither is the United Nations a global villain. The United Nations is a political institution. Politics, as is often said, is the art of the possible. There is no need, therefore, to succumb to despair or cynicism. We should turn the page and move on.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Baboucarr-Blaise Ismaila Jagne, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): Please allow me to convey my delegation's warmest congratulations to Mr. Julian Hunte on his election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am sure that his vast experience on the international scene will be brought to bear on the work of this session, and help direct it with ease to a successful conclusion. The fifty-eighth session promises to be rich in substance, and may also prove to be a watershed in our bid to make the United Nations responsive to the needs of the peoples of the world in the new millennium. I wish to assure the President of my delegation's fullest cooperation in the discharge of his onerous responsibilities.

In the same vein, let me also congratulate the outgoing President, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his laudable efforts during the fifty-seventh session. The dynamic Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, also deserves commendation for another productive year of service to the Organization, a year that was fraught with difficulties and incredible challenges. Thanks to his leadership, we have, by and large, been able to weather the storm.

We were all devastated, however, by the bombing of the offices of the United Nations in Baghdad, which claimed the lives of so many people. May it never recur — please God — but it shows that we must remain united in our resolve to fight terrorism. Let me seize this opportunity to express once again to Mr. Kofi Annan and his staff, as well as to the relatives of the victims, the heartfelt condolences of the people of The Gambia. We pay homage to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, who lost their lives, and we mourn the tragic loss of a highly-acclaimed international civil servant at the hands of terrorists. In wishing the injured a speedy recovery, we pray that the souls of all those who died rest in perfect peace. My delegation strongly urges that that cowardly act should in no way weaken the resolve of the United Nations in fulfilling its obligations to the people of Iraq.

Resolution 1373 (2001) was adopted unanimously by the Security Council following the attacks of 11 September, and the majority of Member States, including my own, have embarked on implementing its salient provisions. We have ratified the major international instruments on terrorism and, furthermore, have enacted domestic legislation to implement them. Let me state that, in spite of our modest achievements in that regard, international cooperation and technical assistance remain critical to the success of our future implementation efforts.

The Counter-Terrorism Committee's assistance unit must strengthen the coordination of its technical assistance portfolio in order to have greater impact. In that regard, we welcome the commitment of the G-8 to provide capacity-building and technical assistance to priority countries. The translation of declarations of commitment into concrete action is the only guarantee of making meaningful headway to counter terrorism. Apart from the recent terrorist attacks against the United Nations in Baghdad, other such incidents in Indonesia, Kenya, the Russian Federation, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, coming in the wake of the attacks of 11 September, are reminders of the enormity of the tasks ahead.

The fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly has been convened at a time when our approaches to the management of global issues have come under sharp scrutiny. Those issues are the unfinished business of the preceding millennium. The United Nations — the premier, overarching venue for multilateralism — cannot but be the only vehicle through which the world's peace and security problems can be solved. The recent events in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere only serve to underscore the need for the nations of the world to strengthen, not weaken, multilateralism. We shall never achieve global peace, security and prosperity without working together in a forum such as the one provided by the United Nations, a forum that is all-inclusive and which permits each and every nation — big or small, rich or poor — to expound on matters of concern to them. The ideals and principles that were the basis of the founding of the Organization are as relevant today as they were 58 years ago. Let us therefore demonstrate our commitment to multilateralism by always turning to the United

Nations. My delegation therefore urges all Member States to maintain confidence in the United Nations and to have recourse to the Organization for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the settlement of disputes.

While terrorism poses a real threat to international peace and security, other violent conflicts continue to rage around the world, leaving death, destruction and desolation in their wake. The situation in the Mano River Union region remains volatile as I speak. Even though former President Charles Taylor of Liberia has left the scene, as was required of him, and there appears to be some laudable progress towards reinvigorating the democratic process in that country, we should be under no illusion as to the extreme fragility of the situation in Liberia, and indeed within the West African subregion. We commend all the parties that recently signed the Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, for their determination and patience, and urge them to do all in their power to stay the course. That would also have a salutary effect on the situation in neighbouring Sierra Leone, where we note with satisfaction the consolidation of the peace process.

However, the problem of conflicts in West Africa continues to be compounded by the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons, as well as by roving bands of mercenaries. International efforts could serve the region best by developing comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation programmes that target militias and that are region-specific rather than country-specific. We must endeavour to address the issue of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons with greater determination. An arrangement similar to the Kimberley Process in blood diamonds is what is urgently required to effectively stem the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons. My Government strongly supports any measure that would treat as accomplices to war crimes and crimes against humanity illegal brokers who knowingly supply arms and weapons to militias and other insurgents in West Africa. Conflict zones elsewhere in Africa that tell a similar story should also be assisted in that manner.

We warmly congratulate our brothers in Sudan on the recent signing of the Naivasha peace accord, which promises to bring the long-drawn fratricidal conflict in that country to an end.

Meanwhile, my Government continues to play its part in the search for solutions to the problems of peace and security in Africa. We participate actively within the context of the initiatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to contribute to the subregion's collective efforts in that area. My Government, under the wise leadership of President Jammeh, has in the past contributed, and will contribute in the future, to subregional efforts to keep the peace in West Africa. We have continuously participated in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) since its inception. We stand ready to contribute our own modest share to any other United Nations peacekeeping operations designed for the West Africa subregion, as we are doing now under the ECOWAS Military Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). In that regard, we welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 1509 (2003), establishing the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

I just made mention of the unfinished business of the preceding millennium. Those are thematic issues of political exclusion, disenfranchisement, economic exclusion and abject poverty. All affect the greater majority of humankind. They also give rise to all the urgent situations that the world is faced with today — situations of conflict and civil strife; in short, of the absence of peace.

A peculiar situation of exclusion was created by General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) on 25 October 1971, which relates, through its direct effects, to Taiwan. From 1949 to 1971, the Republic of China (Taiwan) was a bona fide member of the United Nations, recognized by the comity of nations. If the Republic of China (Taiwan) could be a member of the United Nations then, why could it not be a member now? The General Assembly adopted resolution 2758 (XXVI), which addressed only the question of the representation of the People's Republic of China at the United Nations and related organizations. It did not decide that Taiwan was, or should be, a part of the People's Republic of China. Nor did it confer on the People's Republic of China the right to represent the Republic of China (Taiwan) or the 23 million Taiwanese people in the United Nations and related organizations. Resolution 2758 (XXVI) has since been misused to justify the exclusion of Taiwan from the United Nations. That runs counter to the claim by the Government of the People's Republic of China that it represents the interests of all Chinese, not to mention those Taiwanese who are in the Republic of China (Taiwan). If we are to comprehensively deal with the

problems engendered by exclusion in whatever form it takes, I call on the international community to revisit that issue urgently.

My Government appreciates the special attention that Guinea-Bissau has received from the Security Council, especially through the Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. We also commend the remarkable efforts of the Economic and Social Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau. As Chairperson of the Group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau, my Government acknowledges the groundswell of support and good will that Guinea-Bissau enjoys from the Organization. Unfortunately, that has not yet been adequately translated into material and financial forms of assistance, which the people of that country so desperately need. The recent developments in Guinea-Bissau should be seen not so much as a constraint, but rather as an opportunity to re-engage the international community, in partnership with the people of Guinea-Bissau, in the resolution of their problems of governance and development. Now that concerted efforts are being made by all the major actors to agree on transitional arrangements for the preparation of parliamentary and presidential elections in the not-too-distant future, we call on the rest of the international community to provide the support necessary to stabilize the situation and keep the process on course to a successful outcome.

Problems of security and peace in my part of the world have not in any way diminished our concerns over similar problems elsewhere. The people of Iraq and Afghanistan need urgent international assistance to shore up security, re-establish the rule of law and embark on an effective programme of reconstruction. My Government welcomes the adoption of resolution 1500 (2003), in the hope that the establishment of the Governing Council of Iraq will lead towards a real political transition for the Iraqi people. While a speedy end to the occupation of Iraq is both desirable and urgent, as clearly underscored in resolution 1472 (2003), outstanding issues emanating from Iraq's occupation of Kuwait should be comprehensively dealt with once and for all.

We continue to follow closely the situation in the Middle East, and we deplore yet again the recent spate of vicious attacks and counter-attacks between Israelis and Palestinians, thus negating hope for an early settlement within the framework of the road map. Trust and confidence-building measures must be reinforced and made to attend to every stage of the implementation of the road map, if the peace process is to endure. Suicide bombings that target innocent civilians must be stopped. The occupation of Arab lands must come to an end. In reiterating our position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, we call for the creation of an independent Palestinian State living in peace alongside the State of Israel.

My Government firmly supports the initiatives being taken to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan, two great friends of The Gambia. We urge them both to reduce the arms build-up on their respective sides of the border and to strive harder to reach a mutually acceptable solution to their differences, in particular with regard to the issue of Kashmir. Similarly, we reiterate our support for a peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula.

Human security is not threatened by conflicts alone. The scourge of HIV/AIDS continues to be elusive, and now poses a serious threat to the viability of some societies in Africa. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has slowly evolved from a health and humanitarian issue to a development and security problem. The pandemic has compounded the problems African countries face in the fight against other scourges, such as malaria and tuberculosis. It is gratifying to note however, that the international community is sensitized to that fact and that initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria have been put in place. Consequently, more money, resources and attention must be given to research and development. Contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria have slackened, and developing countries are paying a colossal price in human and material terms. The initiative of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization equally requires adequate funding.

The pursuit of justice and the international rule of law have never been as pressing as it is today. My Government strongly supports the International Criminal Court as it embarks on its crucial mandate of delivering justice. We hail its progress so far, and I would like to seize this opportunity to call on all to cooperate with the Court in order that, together all around the world, we can say no to the culture of impunity.

While still on the subject of justice, let me reiterate my Government's view that the sanctions being imposed on Cuba should now be lifted. They are counter-productive anyway. Cuba is a peace-loving member of the international community whose people do not deserve the punishment that has been meted out to them for almost four decades now.

Let me now turn to development issues. In Africa, our efforts to achieve sustainable development continue to be seriously undermined by a variety of factors, prominent among which are conflicts, structural weaknesses, natural disasters and disease. For the international system to successfully address those factors of underdevelopment, more serious attention must be paid to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, and more attention must be focused on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. We must also give effect to the commitments made at Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg.

There is no shortage of blueprints for development. What is in short supply, and what needs to be urgently mobilized, are resources. So far, there is still a big gap between commitment and action. Africa's development partners must make good on their pledges to support Africa's development. My delegation welcomes the Africa Action Plan of the G-8, the African Growth and Opportunity Act of the United States of America and the "Everything But Arms" initiative of the European Union, all of which commit their sponsors to well-defined forms of support for Africa's development.

There are, however, many barriers to the implementation of those initiatives, which are caused by certain protectionist policies pursued by our partners, as well as other policy and structural constraints. The problem of farm subsidies just will not go away. Agricultural economies in our part of the world must be allowed to compete if the global trading system is to function in favour of the eradication of poverty. The debt issue is far from being resolved and the procedures for accessing the benefits of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative (HIPC) are too cumbersome for many poor countries to follow. The only realistic approach to the debt problem as a major impediment to development is to cancel it unconditionally for HIPC countries and for low-income countries under stress.

We have just ended at Cancún another attempt at negotiations on world trade. My delegation deeply regrets the failure of the talks, as well as the fact that the developed world could not see eye to eye with the Group of 21 on the issue of subsidies. It is in our collective interest to dismantle global trade barriers and allow markets to expand, for incomes to rise in the developing world and poverty to be reduced. Stronger earning power in the developing world would stimulate world trade in ways that would be most beneficial to rich countries. My delegation calls on all concerned to ensure that we return to the negotiating table as soon as possible, and with greater determination on both sides, to reach a just and fair agreement on all the issues involved.

Official development assistance (ODA) still falls short of the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product. We commend the countries whose ODA has risen to that level, in particular Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden.

My delegation urges all of Africa's development partners to address those issues with sincerity and commitment, with a view to meaningfully assisting in kick-starting the sustainable human development process in African countries.

It is gratifying to note that the *Human Development Report 2003* is devoted to the Millennium Development Goals. In that way, the fight against poverty is kept high on the international community's agenda, because we still have a very long way to go. For instance, as stated in the report,

> *"Regionally, at the current pace Sub-Saharan Africa would not reach the Goals for poverty until 2147 and for child mortality until 2165. And for HIV/AIDS and hunger, trends in the region are heading up — not down."* (*Human Development Report 2003, p. 2*)

It is indeed true that sub-Saharan Africa is being left behind. That state of affairs is alarming and, as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has rightly stated, the Millennium Development Goals will not be realized with a business-as-usual approach. The paradox, in our view, is the fact that, while the means to attain the Goals are available, it would appear that the political will to do so is lacking. Let me again quote from the *Human Development Report 2003*.

> "Today's world has greater resources and know-how than ever before to tackle the challenges of infectious disease, low productivity, lack of clean energy and transport and lack of basic services such as clean water, sanitation, schools and health care. The issue is how best to apply these resources and know-how to benefit the poorest people." (*ibid., p. 5*)

In The Gambia, my Government's focus is on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The strategy we have designed to that end is detailed in our poverty reduction strategy paper. In a resource-strapped economy such as The Gambia's, getting all the relevant indicators to perform well towards poverty reduction is a daunting challenge. It is, however, a challenge my Government is prepared to take up. Our special focus is on the empowerment of our people, and we seek to do so by giving priority to our education, health and agricultural sectors, as well as by building capacity among our women, who are the architects of stable and strong nations. That strategy has so far yielded dividends, as evidenced by my country's showing on UNDP's *Human Development Report 2003*.

In the education sector our goal is to achieve full enrolment well before the Millennium Declaration's target year of 2015. As of now, we have taken the gross enrolment rate from 44 per cent, eight years ago, to over 90 per cent today. We have, at the same time, increased non-formal, adult and distance education programmes throughout the country. The net result has been a dramatic drop in illiteracy nationwide. Transition rates from primary to secondary levels have been significantly improved, from 12 per cent, 15 years ago, to over 77 per cent today. Six years ago there were hardly any tertiary level institutions to speak of. Today they abound, and include the new University of The Gambia. That has been made possible by the visionary leadership provided by Al Hadji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President of the Republic of Gambia.

Recognizing the important role women play in the family, in the community and in the nation, my Government has sought to pay special attention to the empowerment of our women through education, training and special income-generating projects. In order to increase opportunities for the girl child in the educational system, we have created a trust fund, entitled "The President's Empowerment of Girls Education Project", to provide full scholarships to girls who would otherwise not be able to go to school for lack of resources. That and other measures geared towards assisting women have helped to close the gender gap in education in Gambia.

Empowering the rural dweller is another priority of my Government. We seek to do so through measures that lead to an increase in access to resources, infrastructure and services, as well as to knowledge and skills. Most villages now have a primary school, and clusters of villages share secondary education facilities.

Our efforts have also been geared towards the improvement of the health of our people. Significantly improved child health care, especially through an extensive and comprehensive immunization programme, has contributed immensely towards a considerable reduction in infant mortality in the last few years. Infant mortality rates have been reduced by one third. Primary health care programmes have been strengthened across the board. Overall, access to health facilities and services have equally been greatly improved, with the construction of hospitals, health centres, clinics and dispensaries throughout the country.

For all these achievements, however, we are humbled by the challenges that still remain. The prevalence of diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and a host of respiratory illnesses, is part of an unfinished agenda. Malaria, in particular, remains a major problem. It is the leading cause of mortality and a major cause of morbidity among pregnant women, contributing to anaemia and low birth weight. Today, with the cooperation of a Cuban medical and health team, The Gambia is number one in Africa as far as its malaria control programme is concerned, according to the World Health Organization.

In the area of agriculture, our objective is to achieve a total transformation of the sector. Our priority is to reduce the drudgery of production and increase productivity through a systematic programme of mechanization. Added to this is our bid to reduce our dependence on rain-fed methods of production, in favour of greater irrigation, using the abundant water resources that the Gambia River and its tributaries provide. A third plank of our programme of empowerment in the agriculture sector is to diversify activities away from the traditional crops by placing greater emphasis on food production as well as on

other non-traditional crops for export. Finally, with all of these objectives already well on the road to success, we are beginning to increase market access, both locally and abroad, for our producers.

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals will depend to a large extent on how well poor countries perform in the areas I have just referred to. It would also depend on how far they themselves are empowered, and made capable of performing, through the requisite support measures from the international community. The United Nations system as a whole can be mobilized further to broker such support for poor countries, and especially for those among them that show promise and positive signs of progress.

My Government has been increasing its efforts to deepen democracy and strengthening good governance in The Gambia. To that end, our intent is to continuously bring improvements to the performance of all arms of government. Our multiparty democratic system forms the backbone of our political dispensation. We continue to conduct free and fair elections at all levels of popular representation. Our courts operate independently. We have encouraged the mass media to grow and expand, with increasingly higher levels of private participation. The international community must have been satisfied with our efforts and achievements in this domain, since the World Economic Forum, meeting in South Africa, decided to classify The Gambia third in Africa, for its performance on good governance. We are indeed honoured by this recognition, and feel encouraged in our resolve to do even better.

Advances in information and communication technology have come to make our world a truly global village. This is indeed remarkable. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that even in this area there is a great deal of catching up to be done by the developing world. Global initiatives geared towards bridging the digital divide between the developed and developing worlds should be pursued with unrelenting vigour.

Scientific and technological research must be conducted in support of the essence of life. In the course of this year, we have heard several claims as to the successful cloning of human embryos. These claims, whether genuine or not, are indeed a wake-up call for all of humanity. The international community must close ranks to address them in a manner that ensures that no one is allowed, for whatever reason, to tinker with science and technology in ways that may upset or threaten nature's fragile balance.

The phenomenon of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing remains a challenge to coastal African States such as The Gambia. It has generated enormous concern at the international level, as is evident from the adoption of various international instruments to combat it. My delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Governments of Japan and Luxembourg and the Food and Agriculture Organization for the assistance that they provide to our fisheries sector, and to fully endorse the Secretary-General's recommendation that technical and financial assistance to developing countries for the conservation and management of fisheries resources should be provided in a comprehensive manner. We call for greater assistance and cooperation in our efforts to promote sustainable practices in the fisheries sector of our economies.

On the crucial topic of United Nations reform, my delegation welcomes the efforts aimed at the revitalization of the General Assembly and the reform of the Security Council. After more than a decade, little progress has been made in our attempts to reform the Security Council so that it is truly reflective of the realities of the international system in the twenty-first century. My Government reiterates its stance — indeed the stance of the entire African region — that the composition of the Security Council has to be revamped and democratized. Membership of the Council must be expanded, with Africa occupying at least two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats. We therefore wholeheartedly support the timely proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities to make concrete recommendations, inter alia, on the reforms of the Organization.

As we move into the business of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, my delegation prays that the Almighty Allah crowns our endeavours with success. We pray that this session proves to be the turning point in our efforts to render the United Nations more relevant, more effective and truly all-inclusive. We pray that at this session, any doubts as to the utility of the United Nations to each and every one of us be put to rest once and for all. We pray that by the close of this session, we shall all have emerged secure in our conviction that only through fuller recourse to the United Nations can we expect to have our global

problems of conflict, peace and security and, indeed, development, frontally addressed, fully contained and completely resolved.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, chairman of the delegation of the Kingdom of Nepal.

Mr. Thapa (Nepal): I greet Julian Hunte warmly as President at this session and assure him of Nepal's full cooperation in his work. His Excellency Jan Kavan, the outgoing President, deserves our appreciation for the job well done. I also pay tribute to the distinguished Secretary-General for providing dynamic leadership to the United Nations.

The last 12 months have been a momentous period of convulsive events. It has been a mixed bag. We have made a dent in combating terrorism, but it remains a serious threat to peace. Some countries have limped back to normality, while others have descended into chaos. All sides have accepted the Middle East road map, but a new cycle of violence is undermining it. Iraq continues to be a source of concern to all. The global economic slump has turned the corner, but growth remains anaemic, and the Cancun trade talks have foundered.

In these developments, the United Nations has come into a sharp focus that is not always flattering. However, Nepal has an abiding faith in the United Nations and believes in its centrality for all humanity's quest for shared peace, progress and justice. To small nations like ours, the United Nations is and should be the bulwark of sovereignty and defender of freedom. It has stood up to such challenges in the past, and it must prepare itself to face the future just as boldly through a process of strengthened multilateralism.

Today, the world faces a number of threats to its peace, progress and harmony. Terrorism is now by far the most immediate threat that afflicts countries, rich and poor, large and small. After 11 September 2001, the concerted battle we have launched has pushed terror into retreat, but the decisive war against it that we must win has yet to be won.

This scourge has not left the United Nations untouched either. For instance, two bombs exploded within the first two months of the United Nations presence in Baghdad at its offices there, killing Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and others, and serving as a grim reminder of the indiscriminate dark threat of terrorism. We condemn the assault on the United Nations and our profound condolences go to the countries that lost their citizens and families who lost their dear ones in those tragic attacks.

My own nation is in the throes of terrorism, perpetrated by the self-proclaimed Maoists for the last seven years. Opposed to constitutional monarchy and democratic order, the Maoists have broken the seven-month ceasefire, withdrawn from the talks and unleashed unspeakable violence on the people. They did so even as the Government showed flexibility in accommodating several of their demands and put a comprehensive package of reforms on the table.

His Majesty's Government has the duty to protect the life and liberty of the people and to defend freedom and democracy in the country. We will do so resolutely but also responsibly. While doing so, we have kept the door of dialogue open. On behalf of the Government, I thank our friends for their understanding and assistance in our war against terror and the Secretary-General for his interest and concern.

Clearly, Iraq continues to be a serious issue. Now that the war is over, the global community must agree to return sovereignty to the Iraqi people as quickly as possible, to let them govern themselves and to help them rebuild their country. The United Nations should be given an enhanced role in this process.

Renewed violence in the Middle East has imperilled the Quartet-endorsed road map, which promises a viable State to the Palestinians and security to the Israelis. Nepal appeals to both sides to exercise maximum restraint and engage in constructive dialogue to attain a comprehensive settlement of the long-festering crisis. It also appeals to Israel to reconsider its decision to remove Palestinian President Arafat.

The Security Council must take an early decision to extend security throughout Afghanistan so that rebuilding can go forward in the country. It should also augment efforts to resolve conflicts and bring stability to volatile countries in Africa and elsewhere.

Nepal has a deep interest in, and unwavering commitment to, United Nations peacekeeping. Nepalese Blue Helmets have served in various missions in an outstanding manner, and many of them have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace and humanity. The United Nations should continue to

help poor troop-contributing countries to bridge their resources gaps, and give them more say in mission planning and deployment of forces.

While firefighting in crisis situations is urgent, the international community must look beyond the immediacy of conflicts and attempt to build an edifice of durable peace in the world. Disarmament, development and the rule of law are the pillars of such architecture. There is a moral case for all of us to work together towards such peace and it is also a matter of enlightened self-interest.

Disarmament and confidence-building measures are critical to building a culture of peace. Nuclear weapons are the greatest threat to humanity and must be eliminated, with their delivery vehicles, in a time-bound manner. Nuclear-weapon States should steadily reduce their nuclear arsenals; the Conference on Disarmament must draw up a strategy to eradicate these arms.

As a nation committed to peace, Nepal welcomes the proposals to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones and to keep outer space free of weapons. We also stress the necessity to reinforce the regimes banning chemical and biological weapons and to strengthen measures to prevent the access of non-State actors to small arms and light weapons.

Nepal supports the regional centres for peace and disarmament as significant tools for building confidence among nations. We eagerly look forward to hosting in Kathmandu the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific. We have asked the Secretariat to revise the draft host country agreements so that they are consistent with diplomatic practices and with the provisions for the other two centres.

Poverty is by far the most entrenched threat to peace and human dignity, and development is the most daunting challenge for the world. The global community must act together to lift people in developing countries from the perils of hunger, ignorance, disease and despair. We must create jobs and opportunities to enable people to lead a decent life and to raise their stakes in peace and order. Nepal has accorded the highest priority to poverty alleviation in its current plan, modelled after the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Broad-based growth, social sector development, targeted programmes and good governance constitute the strategy of the plan. We have liberalized our economy to foster broader partnership with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and community groups and provide a wider space for foreign investment.

Improvements in the agriculture and social sectors as well as in rural infrastructure constitute the core of our quest for poverty reduction and sustainable development. However, Nepal lacks sufficient resources to achieve its development objectives. Our resource constraints have become more acute due to Maoist insurgency and consequent economic disruption. Many other developing countries are in a similar situation.

The global community must join forces, in a spirit of partnership, to eradicate absolute poverty and stimulate development in developing nations. Indeed, the Millennium Summit and global conferences on financing, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS and trade have clearly laid down the way forward. We must ensure that these compacts do not fail in the crucible of implementation.

As developing countries lead efforts for their progress, development partners must keep their commitments by meeting development assistance targets and providing debt relief to the highly indebted poor countries, including the least developed nations.

Increasing development assistance alone, however, will do little to help developing countries unless rich nations dismantle their farm subsidies and pull down their tariff and non-tariff barriers to products from the South. Improved access to world markets is critical for poor nations to attract investment, remove their supply-side constraints and transform their economies. In this context, the Cancun trade talks must be resumed soon and in such a manner that globalization brings benefits to the poor as well.

His Majesty's Government is grateful to the World Trade Organization for deciding to admit Nepal and Cambodia as new members. That is just the first step. Nepal needs, as other least developed countries do, duty-free and quota-free access to, and increased assistance from, rich nations to escape the poverty trap and to integrate itself into the global economy.

Landlocked developing countries face geographic handicaps and remoteness from the major corridors of global commerce. We welcome the fact that the Almaty Programme of Action addresses their problem and we

thank the transit and development partners for making the ministerial meeting a success. We urge all sides to make concerted efforts to implement the Almaty Programme of Action.

Democracy, fairness and the rule of law are the building blocks of secure peace at home and across the world. With this in view, Nepal has embraced pluralistic democracy, constitutional monarchy, and the inviolability of human rights and freedoms as the defining features in our present Constitution.

Our pledge to these values and ideals remains as strong as ever. Parliamentary elections postponed due to the Maoist threat will be held as soon as possible, and immediate steps will be taken to restore and reactivate local authorities. The Government is seriously committed to doing this.

The Government has accorded high priority to raising the status of women, children and disadvantaged people, as well as to preventing trafficking in women. It has established juvenile courts and strengthened the court system, and has tried to give the human rights protection and anti-corruption agencies the necessary tools and resources to do their job.

Nepal firmly believes that the world community should try its level best to promote democracy, justice and fairness in world trade, global governance and international relations. In this spirit, we underscore the imperative need for change in the global trade regime, for reform in the international financial architecture and for help to developing countries to overcome their problems.

Speaking of justice, nearly 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Nepal have been waiting for over a decade to return home in safety and dignity. We hope Bhutan will show more flexibility in the bilateral negotiations to find an early and just settlement. We call on the world community, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to help create a climate conducive for resolving this distressing humanitarian problem by sustaining its interest and assistance for the maintenance of the refugees at this crucial juncture.

No organization can stand the test of time unless it is prepared to carry out bold reforms. Events in the run-up to the Iraq war have shown the frailty of the United Nations and underlined the imperative for immediate and balanced reforms for the Organization to secure more legitimacy, not only in the eyes of the rich but also in the perception of the poor.

While we welcome the reforms the General Assembly adopted last year, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to set up a high-level panel to seek ways to make the United Nations a vibrant, effective and efficient Organization, which can come to grips with emerging challenges.

As we see it, it is imperative for the General Assembly to reclaim its primacy at the United Nations and for the Economic and Social Council to make its work more visible and relevant to ordinary people. To achieve these objectives, we must not only rationalize the agendas of those organs but also ensure that they adopt fewer but more relevant resolutions — resolutions that could be implemented to benefit humanity.

Reforms are long overdue to make the Security Council more democratic in its work and more representative in its structure. Nepal expresses its deep concern at the lack of tangible progress for over a decade on the issue of Council enlargement and urges all Member States to scale up their efforts to achieve that goal. In our view, the Non-Aligned Movement should play an active role in United Nations reform. It should also work closely with the G-77 to advance their shared agenda in this and other respects.

In South Asia, as elsewhere, we view regional cooperation as an instrument of South-South cooperation for collective progress in the region and the world at large. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been inspired by that aspiration. Let us hope our region can put its political differences behind it and steam ahead to find the place South Asia deserves in the community of nations.

If our immediate and overriding preoccupation at home is the restoration of peace, our commitment to regional cooperation and a just and secure world constitutes an objective of equal order. The world has witnessed the resilience of the Nepalese people during the difficult periods in our history. We remain equally committed today to overcome the current challenge. I call on friends and well-wishers of Nepal for greater understanding and cooperation to help us help ourselves in our onward journey to peace and progress.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. A representative has asked to speak in right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba has listened attentively to the address of the Czech Republic and regrets that it has been used to attack Cuba. In the trials in March and April 2003 that were mentioned in this speech, a group of mercenaries who were paid and instructed by the United States in its political and economic warfare against Cuba and who were repeatedly violating our laws, were judged and punished with all guarantees of due process by regular courts and according to pre-existing laws.

Numerous penal codes in Europe and in the United States describe and punish severely this conduct as being "acts committed by organizations under foreign control". Many States have laws as antidotes sanctioning cooperation with foreign Powers.

The Czech Republic is a tool for the United States to use against Cuba. This has repeatedly occurred in the Commission on Human Rights. To that end, Czech-accredited diplomats, parliamentarians and other envoys frequently violate our laws. The Cuban Government regrets that the Czech address did not even mention the fact that the North American blockade of Cuba is a massive, flagrant and systematic violation of the human rights of Cubans.

It has not been said, even now, that the blockade has become more severe and its territorial scope expanded, nor that there is manipulation of the limited Cuban purchases of foodstuffs in the United States, whose rigid restrictions and obstacles impede free trade and confirm the genocidal nature of a blockade that, flying in the face of international humanitarian law, includes medicine and foodstuffs.

My delegation regrets that the Czech address omitted the grave, systematic violation of human rights in occupied Cuban territory, that is to say the naval base of Guantanamo, where the United States subjects to inhuman conditions and practices torture upon the so-called illegal combatants, including some children and citizens of dozens of countries, including European countries that are being kept in limbo now for more than one year.

The Cuban delegation is duty-bound to state that a country in which there is discrimination, repression and ghettoization of a gypsy minority, where xenophobia, violence and murder of immigrants and gypsies go unpunished, where there is public tolerance of racism and neofacism, where police brutality is tolerated, as are the arbitrary arrests of demonstrators, where detainees are refused contact with attorneys and information is denied their families, where dozens of detainees have died in suspicious circumstances, where the foreign residence laws permit police harassment of foreigners, where there are inhuman conditions and hunger strikes in the prisons, where the sex trade and pedophilia increase each day — such a country does not have a shred of moral authority to back their criticism of Cuba.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.